INDIAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS' IDENTITY, RELATIONAL AUTONOMY AND ATTACHMENT TO GOD: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

PhD Synopsis submitted to CHRIST (Deemed to be University) as partial requirement for the award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
PSYCHOLOGY

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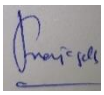

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DECEMBER 2020

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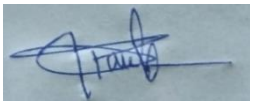
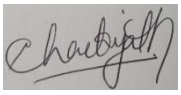
Name of RAC Member: Dr. Jayasankarareddy Signature: 

Name of RAC Member: Dr. Wilson Chakkyath Signature: 

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Abstract

A narrative analysis was carried out on 28 South Indian Roman Catholic religious priests' identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God. The study found other priests' commitment to priesthood influenced 28 participants', and other priests' humane qualities influenced 19 participants' identity. All the 28 participants were committed to a set of values and 18 faced challenges in living their values. All the 28 participants had developed multiple purposes in life and experienced contentment in their priesthood. Participants found advantages and challenges with priestly celibacy, 19 perceived celibacy as availability for the mission, 18 as the freedom to relate with others, and 20 narrated struggles with their sexuality. The participants encountered various challenges in living out their identity, 26 faced challenges from their fellow priests and 22 in the mission. Twenty-one participants were securely attached to both the parents and 25 to their mothers, 13 were insecurely attachment to their fathers and 8 experienced a positive shift in their relationship with fathers. All the 28 participants received autonomy-support from some formators and 22 experienced difficulties with some formators. Twenty-seven participants developed autonomy-supportive relationships with their fellow priests and 22 with the laypeople and 15 with women. Twenty-five participants had received autonomy-support from the provincials, and 25 had difficulties with their provincials. Twenty-six participants experienced the presence of power groups in their provinces. Eighteen participants expressed their relational autonomy through assertive behaviour. Twenty-six participants had developed representations of a secure attachment to God, and 20 were securely attached to the Virgin Mary. Seventeen participants perceived God to be a parental figure, and 22 experienced struggles in their relationship with God. All the major themes related to attachment to God were found among the participants' attachment to God narratives. Eighteen participants connected to God through prayer and 17 through reading the scriptures. Twenty-two participants narrated turning to God during the frightening or alarming moments and 18 during the moments of illness, injury and fatigue, and 25 narrated experiencing God's support. The study found strong support for the correspondence pathway as 24 participants had narratives of correspondence. The study found that for various subthemes the priests from the education ministry differenced with the priests from pastoral ministry, these

differences show the impact of the context of the priestly ministry on the development of priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God narratives.

Key Words: Roman Catholic priests, identity, relational autonomy, attachment to God.

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Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church (hereafter it would be referred to as Church) believes that Roman Catholic Priests (hereafter it would be referred to as priest/s) are called by God for a specific purpose (Hankle, 2010; Maciel, 1992). The priest plays a significant role in the Church. He plays the role of a teacher, preacher and sacramental minister (The Catholic Hierarchy of India, 1995). In the Indian context, the priests are contributing towards people's spiritual growth, physical and intellectual well-being. The Church believes that once a man gets ordained to be a priest, his whole personhood would get transformed at the ontological level, because of that the ordained individual is not same as he was before the ordination (Hankle, 2010). According to the Catholic tradition, the man who gets ordained to be a priest needs to choose lifetime celibacy and abstain from marriage and sexual relationships (Mathias & William, 2012). To get ordained to be a Catholic priest, the candidates need to complete a long phase of formation. The institutions that offer the formation to these candidates are called seminaries/formation houses (Dolan, 2000). The candidates are called seminarians and the trainers/ mentors are called formators (Adubale & Aluede, 2017). The candidates usually join the formation after completing their 10^{th} standard or more, and the formation of the priesthood would last from 12 to 16 years (Adubale & Aluede, 2017; Dolan, 2000). All the seminaries follow a centralized academic programme for each stage of formation.

Catholic Priests in the Indian Context

The priests in the Indian context carry out their priestly duties and responsibilities in various settings. Many of them play the roles of principals or managers in various educational institutions such as schools and colleges (Charles, 2019; Friedrichs, 2018; Lefebure, 2013; Shullai, 2017). Others work in social work settings, joining with people's struggles to get their basic rights, and creating awareness among the people on various issues that affect society (Kavi, 2020; Lefebure, 2013; Vithaythil, 2009). The priests also work in the parish setting, mainly catering to the spiritual needs of the believers. Some priests work in the formation settings as mentors to train the younger candidates to the priesthood. The mentors and the seminarians live together in the same institution and along with the academic programme, these mentors also provide personal guidance to the candidates (Adubale & Aluede, 2017; Goodstein, 2008). Very few priests, during their lifetime, carry out

their priestly ministries only in one particular ministry. Priests often move from one ministry to the other. The Indian priests who are predominantly carrying out their priestly responsibilities in the education settings could be grouped as one group. These priests carry out their priestly responsibilities in the structured settings. The priests carrying out their priestly responsibilities in parishes, social work settings and formation settings could be considered as priests working in the pastoral ministry settings and grouped as another group. These priests carry out their priestly responsibilities in the semi-structured settings. Those priests who are carrying out their priestly ministries predominantly in the in legal, communication, health and mental health sectors are not included in the study, because the contexts in which these priests carry out their priestly responsibilities are different from the education and pastoral ministry contexts.

Identity

Erikson (1968) stated that identity is an important milestone to be attained during the adolescence, as it prepares the ground for the individual to enter into intimate relationships with other individuals and to become productive adults. Identity is as "a complex psychological state that provides a sense of direction, commitment, and trust in a personal ideal or self-image" (Gullotta et al., 2000, p.76). Along with this, it also provides a "clear and stable sense of who one is in the larger society" (Weiten & Lloyd, 2006, p.342). The child till reaching the age of adolescence identifies and models oneself after the significant adults. During the adolescence as part of the identity formation, one needs to integrate the past identifications, and future aspirations into a clear identity structure, that would provide a coherent future direction to ones' life (Feldman, 2018; Papalia et al., 2004; Santrock, 2007). Because of its significant role in the individual's life, identity resolution is a major personality achievement in an individual' life (Berk, 2008). Identity can be defined as the process of integrating ones' occupational choices, values and purpose in life, and sexual relationships into a comprehensive personality structure (Papalia et al., 2004). Since this is a unified structure, it enables the individual to have a sense of who one is, and where one would fit in the larger society, and to move one's life towards a particular direction (Feldman, 2018).

An individual can arrive at identity resolution only after engaging in a meaningful exploration of available choices and roles (Marcia, 1966, 1980, 2002, 2009, 2010; Marcia & Josselson, 2013; Newman & Newman, 2003), and finally

commit to a vocation, set of values and a sexual relationship (Crocetti et al., 2012; Feldman, 2018; Gullotta et al., 2000; Marcia, 1966, 1980, 2009, 2010; Marcia & Josselson, 2013; Oleś, 2016; Santrock, 2013, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2011). The first identity resolution is not the only identity resolution, as it might last only for some time. Many individuals go through several identity reformulations throughout their life (Berk, 2008; Broderick & Blewitt, 2015; Crain, 2011; Kroger, 2007; Papalia et al., 2004; Santrock, 2007). According to the identity theory, the priests need to attain their priestly identity to acquire a sense of direction and to become contributing members in whichever context they carry out their priestly responsibilities.

Relational Autonomy

Autonomy is an experience of freedom to choose behaviours and activities that are meaningful to one's life (Broeck et al., 2016; Chen, Vansteenkiste, et al., 2015; Rasskazova et al., 2016). As individuals live in social contexts with other individuals, significant people influence the individuals' autonomous decisions (Walter & Ross, 2014). Along with significant others, the traditions and social systems also affect the individuals' autonomy development and autonomous functioning (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Walter & Ross, 2014). Before making any major decisions, individuals often consult and engage in a meaningful dialogue with significant others such as parents, life partners, family members and so on. At times the significant others, even before the individual made an autonomous decision, would want the individual to consider their demands and concerns, as the individual's decision might also affect their life significantly. As the individual's decisions are influenced by significant others and in turn, the individual's decisions affect the significant others' lives, the individual's autonomy becomes relational autonomy, that needs to be achieved through meaningful dialogues and negotiations with the significant others (Walter & Ross, 2013, 2014).

Relational autonomy is about how an individual with the support from the significant others develops autonomy related beliefs, attitudes and competencies, and puts them into practice in the appropriate contexts (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). Along with this, in the face of threats to the autonomy, how the individual with the autonomy support from the significant adults maintains autonomy and makes autonomous decisions (Christman, 2014). All throughout the process the individuals' supportive relationships with the significant others play a crucial role both in the process of development of relational autonomy competencies and in the process of

putting them into practice in the appropriate contexts (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Walter & Ross, 2013).

The concept of relational autonomy has a lot of significance for the priests because these priests take the vow of obedience to voluntarily submit their freedom to choose the type of priestly ministry, the place to live and carry out the priestly ministry and the choice of academic studies to the choice of their provincial (Congregation For The Clergy, 2013). At times the Church traditions also influence the priest's autonomous decisions as the priests are expected to uphold these traditions and traditional values. Because of this, even if the priest finds meaningful ministry, and the place to carry out his priestly ministry and the studies to pursue, he would not be able to make any commitment to them, unless he enters into a series of dialogues with his provincial, and get his approval.

Attachment to God

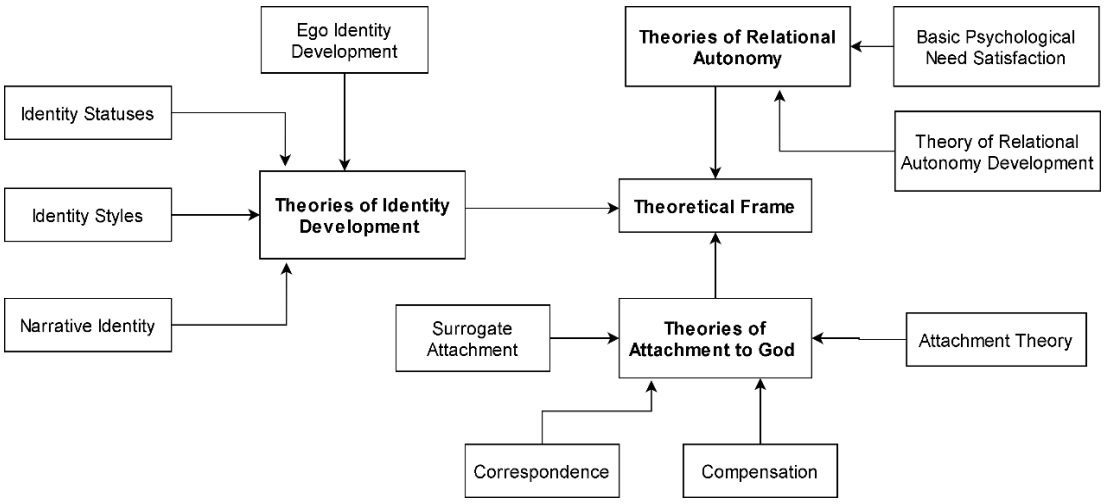
According to the attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988), the infant gets attached to the primary caregiver because this attachment protects the infant from physical as well as psychological harm. The mere awareness about the availability of the attachment figure provides security to the individual (Bowlby, 1979). Taking a lead from the attachment theory, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) drew an analogy between an infant and mother attachment to the devotee and God attachment. Monotheistic religions believe in a God who is personally accessible and responsive to the believers' concerns and needs (Granqvist, 1998; Proctor et al., 2009) and is willing to enter into a personal relationship with the people (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Many believers tend to experience a deeper emotional relationship with God and perceive Him to be a personal companion in their life journey (Horton et al., 2012). Along with this, many religious writings depict God's love for the humanity in the form of human love, and God as someone caring, protecting and comforting the troubled persons (Cicirelli, 2004; Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist et al., 2010; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 1998). Many of the monotheistic religions especially the Christianity's descriptions of God's love for the people has a resemblance to the love shown by the human attachment figures (Cicirelli, 2004; Granqvist et al., 2010; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Hall, 2007; Miner, 2009; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Some authors argue that a secure attachment to God would offer the same psychological benefits found in one's secure attachment to a human attachment figure (Granqvist et al., 2012; Huguelet et al., 2015). Kirkpatrick

(1992, 2005) found differences in the way individuals form an attachment to God. These individual differences are classified as correspondence and compensation pathways. For some individuals, their attachment to God corresponds to their internal working models, and for others, it compensates for the lack of secure attachment with the primary caregivers (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Hall, 2007; Hall et al., 2009; Miner, 2009).

Theoretical Background

Figure 1

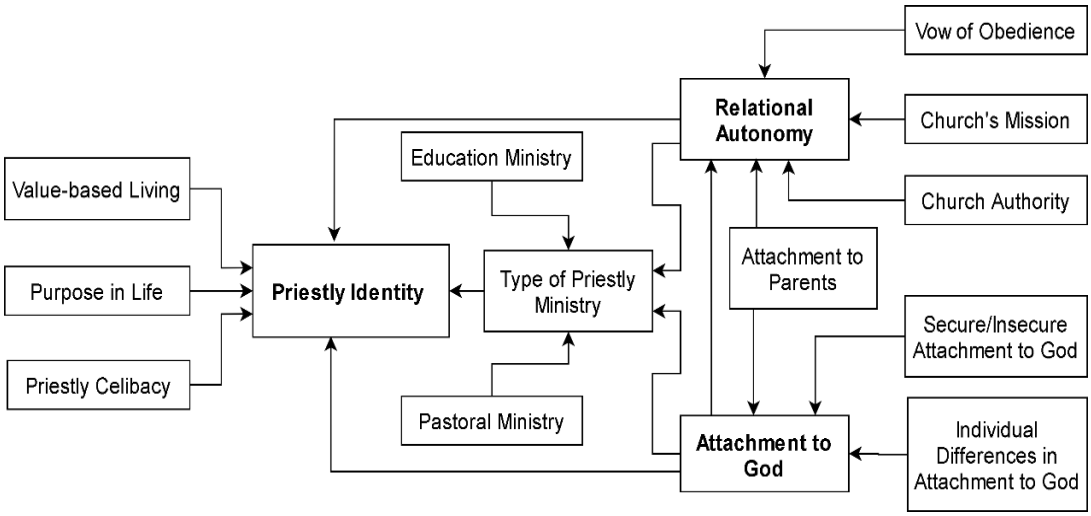
Theoretical frame for identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.



The theoretical frame presented in figure 1 shows that the priestly identity draws theoretical support from Erikson's ego identity development theory, identity statuses and identity styles theories and narrative identity theory. Relational autonomy draws theoretical support from the basic psychological need satisfaction theory and theory of relational autonomy development. Attachment to God draws theoretical support from attachment theory, the theory of surrogate attachment and theories of correspondence and compensation.

Figure 2

The conceptual framework depicting the relationship among the concepts: priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.



The conceptual framework as given in figure 2, show that value-based living, purpose in life, priestly celibacy and the type of priestly ministries contribute towards the formation of priestly identity. The conceptual framework also depicts the impact of relational autonomy and attachment to God on the formation of the participants' priestly identity. The Catholic priests' relational autonomy is influenced by their attachment to parents, the vow of obedience, Church's mission and Church authority. The individuals' attachment to God is influenced by the priests' attachment to their parents and the individual differences in the participants' attachment to God, as a result the participants would form either secure or insecure attachment to God.

Research Paradigm

The research paradigms constructivism (Creswell, 2007) and social constructivism (Willig, 2008) were used for this study. The researchers with this worldview believe that the reality is hidden and it must be uncovered through the process of the researcher's interaction with the participants (Ponterotto, 2005), and their own personal and cultural background and values would influence the way they interpret the participants' life experiences (Costantino, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

Positionality

The investigator himself is an Indian Catholic priest. He has been a Catholic priest for the past 17 years. He has been involved in training and animating the Catholic priests for the past 8 years. He is likely to continue to the same work in the future also.

Problem Statement

The candidates who choose to become priests join the seminaries, which are exclusively reserved only for the candidates to the priesthood, and remain in the seminary formation for 12 to 16 years. The adolescents of their age would be engaged in the process of identity synthesis. The candidates for the priesthood who are in the seminary's settings, along with preparing themselves to be the future priest also need to complete the process of at least their first identity formulation. Unlike for the general population, often the occupation is already fixed for these future priests. Though there are various types of ministries available in the Church, as the priests through their vow of obedience to their super general/provincial have surrendered their choices related to the type of priestly ministry to the decisions of their provincial, they cannot enter into the priestly ministry of their choice. Regarding the values, the Church has clearly defined values and the priests are expected to adhere to these values. Regarding sexual relationships, the priests have to embrace compulsory celibacy. Because of all these factors, unlike their peers in the outside world, the candidates for the priesthood have to find unique ways of integrating or personalizing these options and attain their identity synthesis. So, in this context how do the priests attain their identity synthesis and live their priestly identity commitments, and find purpose and meaning in the contexts that offer very limited personal options. Along with this how do they integrate the traditional priestly qualities and people's expectations about the priesthood into their priestly identity.

Autonomy plays a crucial role in identity exploration and commitment. Even if the priest engages in active exploration of various available priestly ministries, or if he feels that he has been called to contribute through a specific priestly ministry, the priest cannot engage in that particular priestly ministry and contribute, unless he develops relational autonomy. Relational autonomy would enable the priest to get into a meaningful dialogue with his provincial, to convince him about the significance of his personal choice and how it would enhance or contribute to the Church's mission. The priest needs to maintain a balance between his call to contribute through a specific ministry towards which he is strongly drawn, and his vow of obedience because of which he surrendered his freedom to choose the type of priestly ministry to the decisions of his provincial. So, within this context how do the priests developed their relational autonomy and negotiate with their provincials about the kind of priestly ministry they would like to engage into and find meaning and fulfilment in

their life. Added to this, who are the significant people that contribute towards the priests' relational autonomy development.

The priestly ministry is a spiritual ministry and a priest's relationship with God has a deep impact on the way he would be functioning as a priest. Literature shows that believers can form an attachment to God, like the way they formed an attachment to their primary caregivers. A secure attachment to God offers all the psychological advantages found in the secure attachment to a human attachment figure. Believers not only form a secure attachment to God; they could also form an insecure or anxious-avoidant attachment to God. The literature also found that individuals' attachment to their parents' influences their attachment to God. The priests had gone through several years of formation during which they were taught to pray and relate with God. In this context, how do the priests form their attachment to God, and how does their spiritual ministry and several years of spiritual formation influence their attachment to God, and does the priests' attachment to their parents has any impact on their attachment to God.

Purpose of the Study

To explore the Indian Catholic priests' process of identity and relational autonomy development, and formation of attachment to God, and the impact of their attachment to the parents on their attachment to God.

Significance of the Study

The current study will have a lot of significance for the studies related to identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God. The study focuses on exploring the influence of relational autonomy and attachment to God on the development of an individual's identity. The study findings could be used to support the priets and other individuals in their identity and relational autonomy development and formation of their attachment to God.

Research Questions

1. How do the Indian Catholic priests construct their priestly identity narratives? Which factors influence the Indian Catholic priests' identity development?
2. How do the Indian Catholic priests develop their relational autonomy? Who are the significant people influencing the Indian Catholic priests' relational autonomy development?
3. How do the Indian Catholic priests form their attachment to God representations?

Does the Indian Catholic priests' attachment to their parents influence their attachment to God?

4. Is there a difference between the Indian Catholic priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the educational ministry settings and the pastoral ministry settings, in the way they construct their priestly identity narratives?
5. Is there a difference between the Indian Catholic priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the educational ministry settings and the pastoral ministry settings, in the way they develop their relational autonomy?
6. Is there a difference between the Indian Catholic priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the educational ministry settings and in the pastoral ministry settings in the way they form an attachment to God representations?
7. Is there a possibility to develop a theory on the influence of attachment to God and relational autonomy on the Indian Catholic priests' priestly identity development?

Objectives

1. To understand the way the Indian Catholic priests, construct their identity narratives.
2. To understand the way the Indian Catholic priests, develop their relational autonomy.
3. To understand the way the Indian Catholic priests, form the attachment to God representations.
4. To understand the difference between the Indian Catholic priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the educational settings and the pastoral ministry settings, in the way they construct their identity narratives.
5. To understand the difference between the Indian Catholic priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the educational settings and the pastoral ministry settings, in the way they develop their relational autonomy.
6. To understand the difference between the Indian Catholic priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the educational settings and the pastoral ministry settings, in the way they form the attachment to God representations.
7. To develop a theory on the influence of attachment to God and relational autonomy on the Indian Catholic priests' priestly identity development.

Review of Literature

The systematic review of literature covers the three main topics of the study, identity, relational autonomy, and attachment to God. The articles for the review were retrieved from various databases like PROQUEST Research Library, Taylor and Francis, EBSCOhost – Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Sage Journals, JSTOR, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and Google etc. The following keywords were used to search the articles: Roman Catholic priests, Roman Catholic priestly identity, clergy identity, identity narratives, identity styles, identity statuses, celibacy, values, purpose in life, contentment, relational autonomy, autonomy support, authority in the Catholic Church, formation to the Catholic priesthood, formators, seminarians, attachment to God, individual differences in attachment to God, correspondence and compensation.

Process of Identity Development

A few studies carried out on the priestly identity found that priests believed in a clear-cut distinction between priests and laity (Krindatch & Hoge, 2010). There was a positive relationship between priestly identity and faithfulness to praying the Liturgy of the Hours (Baumann et al., 2017). Other studies found that significant others such as parents (Baldwin et al., 2020; Fisherman, 2011; Luyckx et al., 2016; Tran, 2017), teachers (Timmerman, 2009) and mentors (Mcintyre & Hobson, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2013) influenced the adolescents' and emerging adults' identity-related exploration and decisions.

Studies carried out on purpose in life found that purpose in life begins in the adolescence (Hill et al., 2010), and students from the monotheistic religions displayed the highest purpose in life than the students from deism and naturalism worldviews (Molcar & Stuempfig, 1988), individuals developed multiple purposes in life (Rainville & Mehegan, 2019), purpose in life was high and stable in midlife (Ko et al., 2016), and higher levels of purpose in life were positively related to better cognitive functioning (Lewis et al., 2017), lower mortality (Hill & Turiano, 2014) and affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kent et al., 2016). Other studies found a positive relationship between church attendance (Francis & Burton, 1994; Robbins & Francis, 2000), intrinsic religious motivation (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2014), and personal prayer and purpose in life (Francis & Burton,1994). A few studies have been carried to explore the contentment among the Roman Catholic

priests found that Catholic priests experienced contentment in life (Barnard & Curry, 2012; Cornelio, 2012; Francis & Crea, 2015; Krindatch & Hoge, 2010; Rossetti & Rhoades, 2013).

Hitlin (2007) found that Altruistic-institutional values significantly predicted volunteer identity. Hardy and Carlo (2005) found a positive relationship between religiosity and prosocial values, and a study by Schludermann et al. (2000) found the relationship between religiosity and prosocial values only for boys. In another study, Christians scored higher in the values of achievement, universalism, tradition and benevolence than the Muslim participants (Costa & Goodwin, 2006). Laird-magee et al. (2015) found that parental value system and religious training influenced the emerging adults' value system. Other studies found that older people gave priority to collective values over the individual values, older age and selflessness predicted universalism, benevolence (Beller, 2020; Pantaléon et al., 2019).

A few studies carried out on the priests' celibacy found that majority of the priests had a positive attitude towards celibacy. Baumann et al. (2017) found that 61% of the priests stated that celibacy helped them to minister the people faithfully, and 34% of the priests considered celibacy as burdensome and among this 24% stated that they would not choose celibacy again. In another study by Galea (2011) found that only one out of 10 priests were disobeying celibacy, two out of 10 felt that celibacy was a burden and four out of five felt that they can maintain self-control related to sexuality. Joseph et al. (2010) found that for 70.9% of the Indian priests, the commitment to celibacy was fulfilling, for 13.2% the celibacy was not fulfilling, and 15.9% priests were neutral on this. Cornelio (2012) found that many priests in this study didn't open up deeply about any issues related to celibacy, and some spoke about their frustrations in their sexuality.

Galea (2011) found that one out of three priests felt pastorally frustrated, and one out of five felt spiritually frustrated, nearly half of them were not satisfied with the means available for their pastoral ministry. In another study, Rossetti and Rhoades (2013) found that 42.3% of priests felt that they were overwhelmed with their workload. Another study by Francis and Crea (2015) found that 28% of the priests stated that due to emotional exhaustion they experienced fatigue and irritation in their ministry; 23% of them felt discouraged as they didn't get enough personal support for their ministry. In another study, 22% of the Catholic priests felt that they had too much work. (Krindatch & Hoge, 2010).

The literature reviewed under identity development found that significant others such as parents, teachers and mentors influence the adolescents'' identity development. Values are an integral part of an identity and individuals can have multiple purposes in life, and in the middle age, people tend to have altruistic values and high purpose in life. The studies related to celibacy found that some priests found it to be helpful and others found it challenging. Priests faced various challenges in their priestly ministry.

Relational Autonomy

Studies found that adolescents who received high parental autonomy support and high monitoring experienced a high positive affect and life satisfaction (Rodríguez-Meirinhos et al., 2020). In another study, Manzi et al. (2012) found that parents play a crucial role in the adolescents' autonomy development. Romm et al. (2020) found that those adolescents who experienced parental personal attack, invalidating their feelings and withdrawal of love experienced problematic behaviours. Williams et al. (2012) found that parental autonomy support was related to the adolescents' psychological flexibility. Assor et al. (2019) found that autonomy support encouraged adolescents to engage in the exploration of future goals.

Studies carried out among the seminarians found that for the majority of the seminarians' seminary was a place of learning, and a small group of seminarians were not satisfied with the seminary learning (Chukwuorji et al., 2018). Other studies (Boyle & Dosen, 2017; Simonds et al., 2017) found that the seminary curriculum had not focused on preparing future priests to work in Catholic schools.

Studies found that autonomy support from the teachers increased the students' autonomy satisfaction (Cheon et al., 2019; Reeve et al., 2020), and a sense of authentic inner campus (Assor et al., 2019). An intervention study found that teachers' autonomy support enabled the students to become independent learners (Pawlak & Kruk, 2012), the effectiveness of the intervention was lost by the time of delayed post-test.

A few studies were carried out to explore the priests' interpersonal relationships. Rossetti and Rhoades (2013) found that 87.6% of the priests had good priest friends and 93% of the priests had formed a close supportive relationship with laypeople. Baumann et al. (2017) found that younger priests had the highest social support and the older priests had the lowest social support. Another study found that

60% of the Catholic priests got strong emotional support from their family members; and 59% from their non-priest friends (Krindatch & Hoge, 2010).

A few studies were carried out to explore peer's mutual autonomy support. Deci et al. (2006) found that the perceived friends' autonomy support significantly contributed towards the relationship quality. Koudenburg et al. (2017) found that inclusion in a therapy group increased the participants' autonomy levels. Moreau and Mageau (2012) found that the colleagues' autonomy support was positively related to high job satisfaction, subjective well-being, and lower levels of distress, suicidal ideation and intent to leave the job.

A few studies were carried out to explore the priests' relationship with the persons in authority. Cornelio (2012) found that some priests felt that the diocesan leaders did not pay attention to their economic difficulties. Majority of the participants in another study wanted a diocesan bishop who was humane and pastoral at heart, caring and available to the priests (Galea, 2011). In another study, 50% of the Orthodox clergy reported receiving support from their bishops only 29% of the Catholic clergy reported receiving support from their bishops (Krindatch & Hoge, 2010).

Other studies found a positive relationship between manager autonomy support and acceleration in the employees' job performance (Kanat-Maymon & Reizer, 2017), job satisfaction and well-being (Moreau & Mageau, 2012), and reduced the employees' burnout (Gilbert et al. 2017). Hardré and Reeve (2009) found that intervention training helped the corporate managers to support autonomy development in their employees.

Some studies have been carried out on the decision-making process among the adolescent population. Hegna and Smette (2017) found that the youth's educational decisions were influenced by their parents, friends and school. Sjaastad (2012) found that for 22% of the students, parents were a major source of inspiration and for 9% of the students, teachers were a major source of inspiration. N.C.(2013) found that adolescents perceived their parents' concern about their future prospects.

The literature reviewed under relational autonomy found that significant others such as parents, teachers, mentors and peers influence the adolescents' relational autonomy development. In work settings, managers influence the individuals' autonomy development. The studies related to priests found that majority of the priests had developed supportive relationships with fellow priests and

laypeople. Some priests received autonomy support from their authority and others faced challenges with the authority. The studies related to decision making found that most studies focused only on educational decision making and the adolescents' educational decisions were influenced by parents and teachers.

Attachment to God

A few studies were carried out to explore the priests' attachment to God relationship. Cassibba et al. (2008) found that a higher number of priests and religious were more securely attached to God than the laypeople. More than 50% of the laypeople had formed an insecure or ambivalent attachment to God. The priests and religious group had also formed a secure attachment to the Virgin Mary. In another study older adults and those who lost their human attachment figures perceived God as the ultimate attachment figure (Cicirelli, 2004).

Rossetti and Rhoades (2013) found that 90% of the priests in their study believed that they were close to God and God loved them personally and directly. Raj and Dean (2005) found a significant positive relationship between spiritual activities and personal accomplishment, whereas the relationship between spiritual activities and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and depression was not significant. In another study, Galea (2011) found that though all the priests daily celebrated the Eucharist, said the daily prayer, only three out of 10 felt spiritually satisfied. Büssing et al. (2016) found that Confession and the Liturgy of the Hours were strongly related to the perception of the transcendent for the priests, whereas for the pastoral workers it was only moderately related. Proeschold-Bell et al. (2014) found that for the United Methodist Church clergy the presence of the power of God in daily life and Ministry was concurrently and predictively negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, depression, stress, and anxiety. Houser and Welch (2013) found a positive relationship between avoidant attachment to God and attachment to God anxiety. Jankowski and Sandage (2014) found that spiritual instability was positively related to the insecure attachment to God. The individual who had an insecure attachment to God had lower levels of self-awareness and self-regulation.

The studies found that the believers maintained proximity to God (Counted, 2016; Kimball et al., 2013) through prayer (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018; Counted, 2016) through spirituality-based activities (Cooper et al., 2009). They perceived God as a safe haven (Counted, 2016; Kimball, Boyatziz, Cook, Leonard, Flanagan, et al., 2013; Proctor et al., 2009), and a secure base (Beck, 2006; Counted, 2016; Granqvist et al.,

2012; Kimball, Boyatziz, Cook, Leonard, Flanagan, et al., 2013; Proctor et al., 2009), and as stronger and wiser. (Counted, 2016; Kimball et al., 2013).

The studies carried out to explore the individual differences in attachment to God found the support for correspondence between individuals' attachment to God and attachment to their parents (Bradshaw et al., 2019; Granqvist et al., 2012; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992; Knabb & Pelletier, 2014; Mcdonald et al., 2005) and one study found individuals' secure attachment to God compensating a lack of secure attachment to parents (Kimball et al., 2013). Some studies found support for both correspondence between the individuals' attachment to God and attachment to their parents, and a secure attachment to God compensating a lack of secure attachment to their parents (Granqvist, 1998; Murunga et al., 2017). The studies found that along with parents even the participants' secure attachment to other individuals (Granqvist et al., 2012; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992) or attachment to small groups (Knabb & Pelletier, 2014) also corresponded with their attachment to God. Hall et al. (2009) got a mixed result for the compensation and correspondence pathways.

The literature reviewed under attachment to God found that God and the Virgin Mary can be attachment figures. More priests were securely attached to God than laypeople. All the qualities found in the human attachment relationship were found in the individuals' attachment to God. One's attachment to God could either correspond to thier attachment to parents or compensate for the lack of secure attachment to parents.

Rationale for Study

The literature reviewed under the process of identity development reveals that the process of early or first identity development is influenced by parents, teachers, mentors and friends. The purpose in life begins as early as the adolescence, and some individuals tend to have multiple purposes in life. Religious world view, religious motivation, prayer, and church attendance influence individuals' purpose in life. Values are an integral part of identity formation, religious orientation and parental value system influence the individuals' choice of values, and middle age and older age individuals possess more prosocial values. Studies on the priestly celibacy found that while the majority of the priests were happy with their celibacy, some considered it as a burden to live with and some struggled with sexual sublimation.

The literature reviewed for the first three subtopics, the influences on the process of identity development, purpose in life and value-based living have been

mostly carried out on the general population. These essential components of identity development have not been sufficiently explored by any studies among the priests. The study results carried out on the general population cannot be fully applied to the priests because they would go through a specific and intensive 12 to 16 years of formation to become priests. During the time of formation, the candidates are most likely to engage in deeper explorations related to the priestly identity, purpose in life and value system, so the exploration and exposure during the formation might bring a shift in the candidates' identity, purpose in life and value system. Added to this, the Roman Catholic priests, unlike the general population is a special group of people who opted for a spiritual purpose. Often the Catholic tradition provides ready-made values and purpose in life for these priests. So, there is a need to explore how the priests integrate the purpose and values handed down by the Catholic traditions into their identity synthesis.

The literature reviewed under the section related to relational autonomy shows that along with the parents, teachers and mentors also could provide autonomy support to the students under their care and that improved the students' relational autonomy. And lack of autonomy support from these significant adults negatively affected the adolescents' autonomy development. The literature also found support for the influence of peer autonomy support on the individuals' relational autonomy development. In the work settings, the managers and supervisors also contributed towards the employees' autonomy development. When the review findings are applied to the priests it can be assumed that their relational autonomy development would have started even before they joined the seminary formation. Once they joined the seminary formation, their relational autonomy development would take a different turn. During the initial stages of their formation to the priesthood, the current study participants took the vow of obedience, because of which they surrendered their freedom to choose the type of priestly ministry, the further academic qualifications, the place to work to their provincials, who in turn would make the decisions for these priests. While their peers in the outside world would be acquiring more and more personal freedom that would contribute towards their relational autonomy development, the candidates for the priesthood would be giving up more and more of their freedom to choose and decide, and this process would go on till the end of the priests' life. Because of this, the way the priests develop their relational autonomy would be different from the way their peers in the outside world would develop their

relational autonomy. So, because of this, the review findings related to the general population cannot be applied to the priests' relational autonomy development, and there is a need to explore the way the priests develop their relational autonomy.

The literature reviewed related to attachment to God shows that God can be a perfect attachment figure for the believers. Along with God, the Virgin Mary also serves as a spiritual attachment figure. Those believers who are securely attached to God would maintain close proximity to God through personal relationship with God, engaging in spirituality-based activities, prayer and Scripture reading. In the moments of anxiety, they would turn to God whom they perceived as a haven of safety. The individuals who were securely attached to God believed that in the moments of threats and challenges God would be available and accessible to them. Their perception of God as a secure base enabled them to engage in deep personal exploration and expand their comfort zone. The believers also perceived God to be stronger and wiser and they could rely on God. The literature on the individual differences in attachment to God found that a secure attachment to God can compensate lack of secure attachment to the human attachment figure. Attachment to parents, people or even small groups can be transferred on to one's attachment to God. Thus, both compensation and correspondence can occur in one's attachment to God.

Even though there is enough evidence in the literature that God can be a perfect attachment figure, all these studies had been carried out in the context of the lay people's attachment to God experiences. The Roman Catholic priests are a special group of people who have primarily chosen spiritual ministry as their life calling. Unlike the general population, these priests would go through a lot of training in spiritual practices and engage in deep theological, philosophical and psychological exploration. Added to this, these priests, by the nature of their office hold the responsibility of helping the faithful to form a close relationship with God. Because of this, the study results which were mainly carried out in the context of the lay peoples' attachment to God cannot be generalized to the priests' relationship with God.

The review findings for all the three major sections in the current study, the process of identity development, relational autonomy and attachment to God, which were mostly carried out on the lay people cannot be generalized to the Roman Catholic priests. So, there is a need to carry out an explorative study on the Catholic priests.

Method

Sampling Plan

The participants were selected through a purposive sampling method. Data was collected from 29 participants from the five South Indian States, namely Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. During the data analysis phase, one participant chose to discontinue from the study, because of that only the data collected from the remaining 28 participants was used for the final data analysis. Participants were selected from various major and minor religious congregations. The sampling plan focused on matching the number of participants carrying out their priestly responsibilities predominantly in the educational ministry settings with the participants carrying out their priestly responsibilities in the pastoral ministry settings. Fifteen participants were selected from the educational ministry settings and among them, one chose to leave the study this reduced the number to 14. Another 14 participants were selected from the pastoral ministry background. These participants included in the pastoral ministry settings were carrying out their priestly ministry in the parish, formation and social work settings. The participants' ages ranged from 40 to 63 years, with the mean age of 48.82 years and a standard deviation of 7.55; and their service in the priesthood ranged from six to 30 years. Concerning the studies in the field of Scriptures, theology and spirituality eight participants acquired licentiate degrees and two acquired Doctor of Philosophy. Concerning academic studies, ten participants acquired Bachelor's degrees in Arts and nine in Education. Sixteen participants acquired post-graduate degrees in Arts. Three participants acquired a Masters of Philosophy in academics, and two acquired Doctor of Philosophy and one completed Post Doctorate in academics.

Inclusion Criteria

- The Roman Catholic priests belonging to various major and minor religious congregations.
- The Roman Catholic religious priests who were born and grew up in their childhood in any one of the five South Indian States.
- The Roman Catholic religious priests who are in the age range of 40 to 65 years.

Exclusion Criteria

- Roman Catholic diocesan priests.

- The Roman Catholic religious priests who are working in the South Indian States, but not born and brought up in the South Indian states.
- The Roman Catholic religious priests who are born and brought up in one of the five South Indian States with cultural roots in other Indian cultures.

Conceptual Definitions

Religious Congregations in the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church approves the establishment of the various religious congregations both for men and women that would carry out the church ministry. The religious congregation is headed by a Superior General (Wikipedia, n.d.), who is directly under Roman Pontiff who is called the pope. Many of the religious congregations have several institutions spread across various continents and countries, for ease of administration the major congregations are subdivided into various provinces (Vermeersch, n.d.).

Provincial

A provincial is the head of the province (Vermeersch, n.d.). He is the immediate person in authority for all the religious priests and various institutions within the provincial jurisdiction. All the priests who work under the leadership of the provincial, because of their vow of obedience the provincial would decide the type of priestly ministry a priest would get into, the place of work and additional educational qualifications.

Priestly Ministry

The type of occupation priests carry out as part of their priesthood is called priestly ministry.

Roman Catholic Religious Priests

All the priests who belong to various religious congregations are called Roman Catholic Religious priests. These priests take the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience. They carry out their priestly responsibilities under the leadership of various provincials (The Canon Law Society, 1983). Unless they are given special permission, they live in various religious communities with their fellow priests.

Vow of Obedience

Vow of obedience is one of the three vows taken by all the religious priests. Because of the vow of obedience the religious priest surrenders his freedom to choose

the type of priestly ministry, the place to carry out the priestly ministry to the decisions of the superior general/provincial (Religious Vows, n.d.).

Power Groups in the Religious Congregations

Power groups are formed by a few likeminded priests coming together. They have no legitimate authority and do not have any official recognition by the Church or congregation. These power groups are usually formed based on the caste, language, region etc. Usually, the power group has an unelected leader who demands respect and admiration from the group members. They generally build pressures on the provincials/superior generals to allot a plum share of responsibilities or opportunities to the group members who have an unofficial membership in the group.

Priestly Celibacy

Priestly celibacy is to abstain from marriage, sexual relationships and forming one's, own biological family. So that the priests can be fully available for the people, and to carry out the church's mission (Joseph et al., 2010). The Roman Catholic priests have to accept mandatory celibacy.

Measures

Socio-Demographic Datasheet

The participants' sociodemographic details were collected through a socio-demographic datasheet.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Basing on the literature related to identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared to collect the qualitative data through in-depth interviews. The semi-structured interview guide was validated by two experts from Christ (Deemed to be) University and two external experts. Four pilot interviews were carried out to check the reliability of the semi-structured interview guide.

Research Design

A narrative research design (Creswell, 2007) was used for the current study. Narratives give meaning to an individual's experiences (Esin, 2011). The narrative research focused on a detailed exploration of multiple participants' life experiences (Creswell, 2007; Esin, 2011; Riessman, 2014).

Procedure for the Data Collection

The investigator contacted the first participant in person and briefed him about the purpose and procedure of the study, after obtaining the informed consent from

him, he conducted the first interview. The interview was audio recorded. Similarly, the data was collected from the first five participants. After completing the first five interviews, the investigator transcribed the audio records into Word documents. Based on the research questions and keeping the focus of the study in perspective, lines of enquiry were developed for each of the three main sections namely, priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God. These lines of enquiry enabled the investigators to identify the codes in the transcribed text. The qualitative data was coded with the help of an online software Dedoose.

Data Privacy Methods

The data collected from the participants through audiotapes were safely stored in the investigator's password-protected personal laptop, to which others do not have access. In the next level, the audio files were stored in a specific folder with password encryption. The audio recorder is placed in a cupboard with a lock.

Data Analysis

Narrative Thematic Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using the narrative thematic analysis approach. The thematic narrative analysis enables the researchers to organize the narratives thematically (Esin, 2011; Herman, 2001; McAdams & Cox, 2010; Riessman, 2008, 2014; Riessman & Speedy, 2007). Unlike the other narrative analysis that looks at how the narrative is said and for whom it is said or the structure of the narratives, the narrative thematic analysis focuses on what the narrator has said (Riessman, 2005, 2008). According to this approach, the data is interpreted based on the themes developed by the investigator (Riessman, 2008). The thematic narrative analysis also offers an advantage of finding the common themes across the cases, which can be used for developing a theory (Riessman, 2005). The participants' narratives were analysed based on the narrative thematic analysis and the findings were organized thematically.

Trustworthiness

Interrater Reliability

Thirty per cent of the transcribed texts were coded by two independent coders. The investigator along with another coder coded the texts separately and the interrater reliability was established through Cohen's Kappa. High interrater reliability was established for all the three sections, priestly identity, relational autonomy and

attachment to God. The Cohen's Kappa value for priestly identity k = .88, for relational autonomy k = .89, and for attachment to God k = .90.

Member Check

The developed themes along with the corresponding text were mailed to the participants for the member check. Out of the 28 participants whose interviews were transcribed and analysed twenty-six participants responded stating that the themes represented the deeper meanings they shared during the interview. Only four participants suggested very minor changes to the themes which were included in the final list of themes.

Reflexivity

To check the researcher's bias, the investigator throughout the research process maintained a reflective diary (Esin, 2011).

Permission for Data Collection from the Institutional Review Board

Before the data collection was begun, to obtain the ethical clearance for collecting the data from the participants, the informed consent form and the final research proposal were sent to the Institutional Review Board of the Christ (Deemed to be) University. The Institutional Review Board of the Christ (Deemed to be) University approved data collection.

Ethical Conditions

- Before the data collection, all the participants were given a brief description of the research and their preliminary consent was taken.
- Before the data collection, the informed consent form was clearly explained to the participants and all their concerns and doubts were clarified.
- Signed informed consent was taken from all the participants.
- The participants were told that if they are uncomfortable to answer any of the questions from the semi-structured interview guide, they were free not to answer those questions.
- The participants were informed that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time of the research. One participant after the interview was recorded and the audio was transcribed requested the researcher to delete his interview. His request was immediately executed and all the data from his interview was deleted from the system.

Results

The themes developed from the participants' narratives are grouped under main themes and subthemes for each of the three sections, priestly identity, relational autonomy, and attachment to God. All the major themes and subthemes for priestly identity and relational autonomy emerged from the participants' narratives. The major themes for attachment to God, viz. seeking and maintaining proximity to God, God as a haven of safety, God as a secure base, and perceiving God as wiser and stronger, and individuals differences in attachment to God were taken from the existing literature on attachment to God (Beck, 2006; Cassibba et al., 2008; Granqvist, 2010; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 1992). The subthemes for attachment to God emerged from the data. The major themes and the subthemes for priestly identity are presented in table 1, for relational autonomy in table 2, for attachment to God in table 3.

Priestly Identity

The participants' narratives reveal that various factors influenced the formation of their priestly identity. The following five major themes, influence on the priestly identity, value-based living, purpose in life, priestly celibacy and challenges in the priestly ministry were drawn from the participants' narratives. Since many themes have emerged for each of these major themes. The themes for each of the major themes were clustered into various subthemes. In the final analysis, the themes for priestly identity were grouped into five major themes and 46 subthemes. The major themes and subthemes for priestly identity are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Major themes and sub-themes for the Indian Catholic priests' identity.

Major Theme	Sub Themes	Frequency
Influences on priestly identity	Influence of other priests' commitment	28
	Influence of other priests' humane qualities	19
	Gradual attraction towards the priesthood	19
	Attraction to the external appearances	15
	Influence of family member's desire	13
	Influence of the lay people's commitment	13
	Influence of biographies of saints on the priesthood	13
	A shift in the meaning of the priesthood	12

	Influence of certain ministries on the priestly identity	5
	Influence people's opinions on priestly identity	6
Value-based living	A clear set of values	28
	Value consistent behaviour	23
	Challenges in value-based living	18
	Value differences with fellow priests	15
Purpose in life	Contentment in priesthood	28
	People-oriented purpose	22
	God-oriented purpose	19
	Presence of future plans	18
	Service-oriented purpose	10
	Absence of future plans	8
	Poor people-oriented purpose	8
	Mission-oriented purpose	5
	Healing the broken-hearted	3
	Willing to work in any setting	3
	Young people-oriented purpose	5
Priestly celibacy	Struggles with sexual sublimation	20
	Availability for the mission	19
	Freedom to relate with others	18
	Experience of loneliness	14
	Celibacy is fundamental to the priesthood	13
	Healthy boundaries with women	13
	Spiritual support for celibacy	13
	Sexual sublimation	13
	Other's attractions as a challenge	10
	Prudence and caution in relationships	7
	Spiritual direction for celibacy	6
	Desire for companionship	6
	Experience of Solitude	3
	Struggles to relate to women	3
	Challenges with fellow priests	26

Challenges in priestly living	Challenges in the mission	22
	Feeling of inadequacy	9
	Conspiracy and false allegations	8
	Affected by family difficulties	7
	Feeling of unworthiness	5
	Limited opportunities to flourish	3

Relational Autonomy

The section on relational autonomy has five major themes namely impactful childhood, experiences in formation, interpersonal relationships, relationship with the person in authority and decision making. The participants' narratives related to relational autonomy are organized under five major themes and 44 subthemes that emerged from the data. The major themes and subthemes for relational autonomy are presented in table 2.

Table 2

Major themes and sub-themes for the Indian Catholic priests' relational autonomy.

Major Theme	Sub Themes	Frequency
Impactful childhood	A close relationship with others in childhood	26
	A close relationship with peers in childhood	27
	Close bonding with mother	25
	Experience of freedom in childhood	25
	Close bonding with parents	21
	A close relationship with siblings	19
	Punitive discipline in childhood	19
	Spiritual foundations in the family	16
	A distant relationship with the father	13
	A distant relationship with others in childhood	10
	Father's alcoholism	8
	A shift in the relationship with father	8
	Restricted freedom in childhood	6
Experiences in the formation	Experience of formator's support	28
	A close relationship with peers during the formation	23
	Difficulties in relationship with the formators	22

	Helpful formation process	14
	Experience of formator's trust	8
	Freedom in the formation houses	7
	A distant relationship with the formators	7
	Cordial relationships with peers during the formation	6
	Experience of Embarrassment during the formation	5
	Unhelpful formation process	5
	Experience of formator's partiality	4
Interpersonal relationships	A supportive relationship with fellow priests	27
	A close relationship with people	22
	A close relationship with women	15
	A close relationship with families	13
Relationship with authority	Presence of power groups in the province	26
	Experience of support from the authority	25
	Difficulties in relationship with the authority	25
	Experience of authority's trust	18
	Experience of authority's favouritism	13
	Effect of the power groups	9
	Disagreements with the authority	8
	A distant relationship with authority	7
	Cordial relationship with authority	4
Decision making	Belief in God's plan	19
	Assertive stand regarding decisions	18
	Struggles to obey authority	17
	Obedience to authority	16
	Authority's choice of studies	10
	Freedom to choose studies	9
	Surrender one's problems to God	4

Attachment to God

The section on attachment to God has six major themes, God as an attachment figure, seeking and maintaining proximity to God, God as a haven of safety, God as a secure base, perceiving God as stronger and wiser, and individual differences in

attachment to God. The participants' narratives related to attachment to God are organized under five major themes and 24 subthemes. The major themes and subthemes for attachment to God are presented in table 3.

Table 3

Major themes and sub-themes for the Indian Catholic priests' attachment to God.

Major Theme	Sub Themes	Frequency
Attachment to God	Attachment to God	26
	Attachment to the Virgin Mary	20
	God, like an earthly parent	17
	A shift in the relationship with God	6
	Attachment to Jesus	5
	A distant relationship with God	5
Seeking and maintaining proximity to God	Struggles in relationship with God	22
	Connect to God through prayer	18
	A feeling of God's presence	18
	Connect to God through Scriptures	17
	Connect to God through meditation	13
	Spontaneous talk with God	12
	Connect to God through Holy Eucharist	10
God as a haven of safety	Turn to God during frightening or alarming events	22
	Turn to God during illness, injury and fatigue	18
	Turn to God during the threat of separation and loss of the loved ones	6
God as a secure base	Experiencing God's support	25
	Experience of God's goodness	14
	A feeling of God's love	12
	A feeling of gratitude to God	12
God as stronger and wiser	Belief in God's guidance	16
	Experience of God's protection	16
	Place one's trust in God	8
	Surrender one's problems to God	7

Individual Differences in Attachment to God

The study found both the themes of correspondence and compensation in the participants' attachment to God narratives. It found strong support for the correspondence pathway, as the participants' secure and insecure parental attachment patterns were corresponding to their attachment to God relationships. Sixteen participants who were securely attached to their parents had developed a secure attachment to God representations. And one participant who was insecurely attached to his parents had developed an insecure attachment to God representations. Seven participants who were insecurely attached to their fathers later experienced a shift in their relationship with fathers. These participants also had developed the representations of a secure attachment to God. All these seven participants though developed a distant relationship with their biological fathers, had formed a secure attachment to their mothers. One participant who lost his father in childhood had formed a secure attachment to his mother, who also died when he was ten years old, had also developed representations of a secure attachment to God.

Three participants who had formed an insecure attachment to their fathers had developed representations of a secure attachment to God. Of the three, two had formed a secure attachment to their mothers. The third participant did not form a secure attachment to his mother as she died in his childhood, and he also did not form any surrogate attachment relationship with any other woman in his childhood. One participant who had developed a secure attachment to his parents developed representations of an avoidant attachment to God.

The difference in the Presence of Themes Between the Groups

The following section of the results presents the difference between the participants carrying out their priestly responsibilities primarily in the educational ministry settings and in the pastoral ministry settings. Differences between the groups were found for some subthemes related to participants' priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God. A higher number of participants from the educational settings had the presence of some themes in their narratives, and the remaining themes were found in a higher number of participants from the pastoral ministry settings. Some subthemes were present in an equal number of participants from both the groups. The differences between the groups are separately presented for all the subthemes related to priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment God in the tables 4 – 6.

Unlike the quantitative method, the qualitative method doesn't have any set pattern to compare the themes. Because of that, the current study used the following approach. If the difference in the number of participants having that particular theme in both the groups is less than two, those themes were removed from the comparison table. Only those themes that had a difference of two or more number of participants were included in the comparison table. Since the comparison was not based on tightly controlled quantitative measures, and themes are only representations of participants' narratives, keeping the space for some error in the coding and drawing out the participants' themes, the current study kept the difference of at least two or more to consider for group differences.

Since these qualitative themes were not corroborated with quantitative measures, the differences between the groups should be seen as indicators and not as categorical differences. Even the two groups presented in the current study, namely the participants carrying out their priestly responsibilities in the pastoral ministry setting and the education ministry settings cannot be seen as tightly categorized groups. Even though the participants were assigned to a particular group, they had also carried out their priestly responsibility in the ministries listed in the other group too. This is essentially applicable to the priests who have been included in the educational ministry settings group. Some of these priests also carried out their priestly responsibilities in the ministries listed under the pastoral ministry settings. The participants are placed into the groups, as their priestly ministry has been predominantly carried out in that particular setting. The priests from the education ministry group carry out their responsibilities in structured settings. The priests from the pastoral ministry group carry out their responsibilities in semi-structured settings.

The aim of exploring the differences between the groups was to ascertain the impact of various experiences in that particular ministry on the development of the participants' priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God narratives. The results presented in the following sections are indicators that could be explored in future studies. These differences may also require further theoretical and empirical evidence which is beyond the scope of the current study.

Differences between the Groups for Priestly Identity Narratives

The differences between the groups for all the major and subthemes related to priestly identity are presented in table 4.

Table 4

Differences between the groups for priestly identity.

Subthemes	Education Ministry (Structured settings)	Pastoral Ministry (Semi-structured settings)
Lay people's commitment	XXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Gradual attraction to priesthood	XXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Shift in the meaning of priesthood	XXXXXXX	XXXXX
Impact of other priests' humane qualities	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX
Value differences with priests	XXXX	XXXXXXXXXXX
Challenges in value-based living	XXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXX
God-oriented purpose	XXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
People-oriented purpose	XXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Service-oriented purpose	XXXXXXX	XXX
Presence of future plans	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXX
Absence of future plans	XX	XXXXXX
Freedom to relate with others	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Desire for companionship	XXXX	XX
Struggles with sexual sublimation	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXX
Challenges in the mission	XXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXX
Conspiracy and false allegations	XXX	XXXXX

Note. 'X' indicates the presence of a particular theme in a single participant's narratives. 'O' indicates the absence of a particular theme in all the participants' narratives in that group.

Propositions for Priestly Identity

- A higher number of priests from the pastoral ministry are more likely to be influenced by the lay people's commitment than the priests in the education ministry.
- A higher number of priests from the pastoral ministry are more likely to be influenced by other priests' humane qualities than the priests in the education ministry.

- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to report value differences with their fellow priests than the priests in the education ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the education ministry are most likely to face challenges in value-based living than the priests in the pastoral ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the education ministry are most likely to have future plans than the priests in the pastoral ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to perceive celibacy as the freedom to relate with others than the priests in the educational ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the education ministry are more likely to face challenges in the mission than the priests in the pastoral ministry.

Differences between the Groups for Relational Autonomy Narratives

The differences between the groups for all the subthemes related to relational autonomy are presented in table 5.

Table 5

Differences between the groups for relational autonomy

Subthemes	Education Ministry (Structured settings)	Pastoral Ministry (Semi-structured settings)
Shift in relationship with father	XXXXX	XXX
Distant relationship with others	XXXXXX	XXXX
Restricted freedom in childhood	XX	XXXX
Punitive discipline in childhood	XXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXX
Spiritual foundations in family	XXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXX
A distant relationship with formators	XXXXX	XX
Difficulties with the formators	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX
Cordial relationships with peers	XXXXX	X
Helpful formation process	XXXXXXXXX	XXXXX
Close relationship with people	XXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Close relationship with families	XXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Disagreements with authority	XX	XXXXXX

Experience of authority's trust	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Power groups in the province	XXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Effect of the power groups	XXXXXXXXX	XXX
Belief in God's plan	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX
Obedience to authority	XXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXX
Authority's choice of studies	XXX	XXXXXXX
Freedom to choose studies	XXXXXX	XXX

Note. 'X' indicates the presence of a particular theme in a single participant's narratives.

Propositions for Relational Autonomy

- A higher number of priests in the education ministry are more likely to form a close relationship with laypeople than the priests in the pastoral ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to form a close relationship with the families than the priests in the education ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the education ministry are more likely to be affected by the power groups in the province than the priests in the pastoral ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to express belief in God's plan for their life than the priests in the education ministry.

Differences between the Groups for Attachment to God Narratives

The differences between the groups for all the subthemes related to attachment to God are presented in table 6. At the end of the table, various propositions related to the participants' attachment to God patterns are presented.

Table 6

Differences between the groups for attachment God.

Subthemes	Education Ministry (Structured settings)	Pastoral Ministry (Semi-structured settings)
A shift in the relationship with God	XXXX	XX
Attachment to the Virgin Mary	XXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Connect to God through Scriptures	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXX
Connect to God through prayer	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXX

Struggles in relationship with God	XXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXX
Illness, injury and fatigue	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXX
The threat of separation and loss	XX	XXXX
A feeling of God's love	XXXXXXX	XXXXX
Experience of God's goodness	XXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
A feeling of gratitude to God	XXXXXXXX	XXXX
Experience of God's protection	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXX
Belief in God's guidance	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX
Place one's trust in God	XXXXX	XXX

Note. 'X' indicates the presence of a particular theme in a single participant's narratives.

Propositions for Attachment to God

- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to connect to God through prayer than the priests in the education ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the education ministry are more likely to have struggles in their relationship with God than the priests in the pastoral ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to turn to God during illness, injury and fatigue than the priests in the education ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to report experiencing God's goodness than the priests in the education ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the education ministry are more likely to report experiencing gratitude to God than the priests in the pastoral ministry.
- A higher number of priests in the pastoral ministry are more likely to express belief in God's guidance than the priests in the education ministry.

Discussion

The section on the discussion focuses on interpreting the study results with the existing literature. The study results for the three main topics of study priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God are separately discussed and interpreted with the existing literature in these areas.

Priestly Identity

The first objective of the study was 'to understand the way the priests constructed their identity narratives.' The study results show that the process of priestly identity development has parallels to the process of identity development among the general population. The differences are found for the formation of sexual identity commitment. While the general population form their sexual identity commitment through a selection of a sexual partner, the priests developed their sexual identity commitment through their priestly celibacy.

Influence on Identity

The priests like the general population narrated that their choice of the priesthood was influenced by the family members and the family context in which they lived. The current study findings, when compared with the studies on the general population (Baldwin et al., 2020; Tran, 2017), show that priests also go through a similar process of identity development like the general population, and like the general population, their family context influenced the process of their priestly identity development.

Twelve participants explicitly stated that they experienced a shift in the meaning of the priesthood. The other participants' narratives implicitly revealed a shift in the meaning of their priesthood. These findings are in agreement with a study that found that mentors influenced the adolescents' identity development (Schwartz et al., 2013). The shift occurred due to various interactions they had with the formators both in the context of classroom learning and in personal mentoring. These findings have a lot of significance for the Church and the practitioners, as the study found that through an organized and systematized exploration one can bring a positive shift in the individuals' identity commitment. Based on these findings, the practitioners can develop effective interventions that would enable the individuals to engage in deeper identity exploration and to make a positive shift in their identity commitment.

All the 28 participants' priestly identities were influenced by exposure to the other priests' commitment to the priestly ministry and 19 participants' priestly identities were influenced by other priests' humane qualities. These findings are in line with other studies carried out on the teacher identity development that found that the mentors and teachers' commitment to teaching and humane qualities, which they observed from close quarters influenced their teacher identity development (Mcintyre & Hobson, 2016; Timmerman, 2009).

Thirteen participants' priestly identity was influenced by lay people's commitment to God and living out their calling, and 13 participants' priestly identity was influenced by reading the biographies of the saints. These findings have a lot of significance for the studies on identity development. These results show that an individual's identity commitment can be influenced by anyone who is living out their identity commitment, even if there are dissimilarities in the nature of their identities. The study found that even reading the biographies of the deceased members who were acknowledged for forming stable identities and living out those identity commitments can influence the individuals' identity development. This shows that even if one doesn't witness others' living out their identities, it is enough to read about it and get influenced.

These results show that an individuals' identity is malleable and through providing opportunities for meaningful exploration one can positively influence the individuals' identity commitment.

Value-Based Living

All 28 participants had developed a clear set of values. Some of them also had formed altruistic values. These findings are in agreement with another study that found that altruistic values played a significant role in developing volunteer identity (Hitlin, 2007). Even though all the participants had formed clear values, 18 participants faced challenges in practising these values. Some participants yielded to these challenges and sacrificed their values, as holding on to those values was posing a threat to their relationship with their fellow priests and others. The other participants in the moments of threats to their values rigidly held onto their values which in turn affected their relationship with their fellow priests and others. These findings are in agreement with the existing literature that states that people tend to consider values as facts and hold on to them rigidly (Gratani et al., 2016) and values can cause friction in one's relationship with others (Oyserman, 2015). Some participants were able to enter

into a meaningful dialogue with the persons involved with the value challenges and resolved the value conflict without sacrificing their values and also their relationship with the individuals involved in the value challenges.

These findings have a lot of significance for the research on identity and relational autonomy. The participants who had developed high relational autonomy were able to engage into a meaningful dialogue with other individuals with whom they had value differences and maintained a personal relationship with these individuals, at the same time made value consistent decisions. These findings show that relational autonomy plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to make identity commitments and to live out those identity commitments.

Twenty-three participants stated that they made value consistent decisions. A few of these participants initially compromised their values and later on learned to negotiate with the persons concerned and made value consistent decisions. These findings show that improvement in the participants' relational autonomy increased their capacity to live out their identity commitments.

Fifteen participants stated that they experienced a value difference with their fellow priests, some of them had only mild to moderate value difference with their fellow priests. For a few of them, the differences were so great that it strongly impacted their interpersonal relationship with them, which often ended in disagreement, lack of cooperation and suspicion. At the same time, they formed a close relationship with other fellow priests who had a similar set of values. These findings are in line with the existing literature that says that values build relationships with people and promote satisfying interpersonal relationships (Gratani et al., 2016) with the people who hold a similar set of values and cause friction among the people who hold a different set of values (Oyserman, 2015).

Purpose in Life

All 28 participants had developed a high purpose in life. These studies are in agreement with another study (Francis & Crea, 2015) that found that priests had high purpose in life. These results are also in line with other studies that found that university students from Christianity or other monotheistic religious backgrounds (Molcar & Stuempfig, 1988), adolescents who regularly attended the church (Francis & Burton, 1994; Robbins & Francis, 2000), who had a regular personal prayer (Francis & Burton, 1994), religious people (French & Joseph, 1999) and middle-aged individuals had developed high levels of purpose in life (Ko et al., 2016). The above

findings from the literature apply to the current study participants, as all the participants were Christians, regularly attended the church, all were religious people and middle-aged adults, and many of them had a regular personal prayer. All the participants had developed multiple purposes in life. This is in agreement with another study (Rainville & Mehegan, 2019) that found that middle-aged persons had multiple purposes in life.

The participants had coherently integrated their multiple purposes into their priestly identity, and each of these purposes added a new dimension to their priestly ministries. They primarily took two approaches to put these purposes in life into practice. Eighteen participants had developed clear and specific plans to achieve their purposes in life. Having a clear set of plans for their priestly ministry requires a lot more efforts and skills on the part of the participants to integrate them into their priestly life and to negotiate with their provincials. All these participants had taken the vow of obedience to obey their provincials. Unless the participants were able to convince their provincial and his council about how these plans would enrich their congregation's charism, it was most unlikely that those plans would be achieved. These findings have a lot of significance for the Church as well as for the society at large. The significance for the Church is that even though the priests, through their vow of obedience surrendered their freedom of choice, still they were able to develop meaningful purposes in life. Significance for the general population is that these results show that even if individuals' freedom is restricted due to various reasons, they can still develop a meaningful purpose in life.

Nineteen participants had developed a God-oriented purpose, and 22 participants stated people-oriented purpose and wanted to reach out to the people in various settings. This is an interesting finding because the Roman Catholic priesthood is spiritual in its very nature and the Church strongly believes that people are personally called by God for a specific spiritual purpose (Hankle, 2010; Maciel, 1992). Yet more participants had developed their purpose in life in the context of reaching out to the people than directly to God. This could be because of the popular Christian Scriptural saying, "truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Mt 25:40. According to this Biblical verse whatever service is done to the people, it would be done to God. Probably this could have strongly influenced the participants' people-oriented purpose, which focused on reaching out to the people and the needy.

All the 28 participants were middle-aged priests. They expressed fulfilment and content in their priesthood. These findings are in line with other studies that found contentment among the Roman Catholic priests (Cornelio, 2012; Francis & Crea, 2015; Galea, 2011; Krindatch & Hoge, 2010; Rossetti & Rhoades, 2013). The participants experienced contentment from their spiritual ministries and other services offered to the people. Developing life purpose and putting it into meaningful priestly ministries enabled the participants to experience contentment in their priesthood. These results show that all the participants were generative.

Priestly Celibacy

Participants' narratives related to their priestly celibacy show that priestly celibacy enabled many of them to be available for the mission. Nineteen participants narrated that celibacy gave them total freedom to relate with people in their mission context. Thirteen participants stated that celibacy was essential to the priesthood. These findings are in agreement with other studies (Baumann et al., 2017; Joseph et al., 2010) that found priests considered celibacy to be helpful for their priestly ministry. Thirteen participants had formed a close supportive relationship with women. Other participants, though didn't form a close relationship with women did not have difficulties in relating to women in general and collaborating with women in the contexts of their priestly ministries.

Twenty participants expressed their struggles in sexual sublimation, which was a struggle to integrate their sexual thoughts, feelings and urges into priestly celibacy. Some of the participants who struggled to integrate their sexual thoughts and feelings in the past gradually learned to integrate them into their celibate identity. These results are in agreement with other studies that found that some Catholic priests experienced struggles with their sexuality and celibacy (Baumann et al., 2017; Cornelio, 2012; Galea, 2011; Joseph et al., 2010).

These findings show that along with marriage and forming an intimate relationship with the life partner, celibacy though not usually followed by many people, can also be one type of sexual identity commitment. These findings have a lot of significance for those individuals who would like to give up their marriage or cohabitation with another individual, for the sake of dedicating their lives for some causes, that without entering into sexual relationships one can still form a meaningful sexual identity.

Challenges in Priestly Life

Twenty-two participants faced struggles and challenges within the context of their priestly ministries. These findings are in line with other studies, which found that the Roman Catholic priests experienced fatigue, irritation (Francis & Crea, 2015) and overwhelming workload (Rossetti & Rhoades, 2013). Twenty-six participants experienced struggles in their interpersonal relationship with their fellow priests. Often the difficulties with their fellow priests affected their emotional wellbeing and quality of their priestly ministries. Eight participants were victims of conspiracies and false allegations levelled against them, the accusation was either related to their ministry or their interpersonal relationships with women. These conspiracies had tarnished some of these participants' public image and reputation and had a strong negative effect on their emotional wellbeing and quality of priestly of ministry. These findings have a lot of significance for the practitioners involved in helping priests and religious persons facing difficulties. The study findings show that false allegations negatively influence the priests' emotional wellbeing a lot more than they affect the general population.

The study found support for another study objective to establish the influence of relational autonomy on the development of priestly identity. The study found that relational autonomy played a crucial role in the process of the participants choice of identity commitments and also living out their identity commitments. When the participants encountered challenges in living out their identity commitments, those participants with well-developed relational autonomy were able to draw autonomy support from multiple relationships and made identity consistent decisions. Whereas the participants with low levels of relational autonomy at times got struct or yielded to the pressures and failed to make identity consistent decisions. This shows that relational autonomy plays a crucial role in exploring and selecting the identity choices and living out their identity commitments.

Relational Autonomy

The second objective of the study was 'to understand the way the Indian Catholic priests, develop their relational autonomy.' The study findings show that up to the stage of the initial formation to the priesthood the participants underwent a similar process of relational autonomy development like their peers in the general population. After their initial formation, the participant took the vow of obedience that required them to surrender their freedom of choice to their provincial. The study

findings show that the vow of obedience did not deter the participants from developing their relational autonomy. The participants who had developed high relational autonomy respected their vow of obedience and at the same time made autonomous decisions. In the contexts where their vow of obedience did not hinder their autonomous decisions, they were fully autonomous and entered into meaningful dialogue and negotiations with the persons concerned. Where their obedience required them to give up their autonomy, they respected that and followed their provincial's decisions. These results show that the priests who have developed high relational autonomy are different from their peers in the outside world because the individuals among the general population would be able to make autonomous decisions in all the contexts as they are not bound by the vow of obedience. The participants who developed only lower levels of relational autonomy had parallels to their peers in the general population who yielded to the pressures, and at times even failed to negotiate their rights with the persons in authority or with significant others.

The study also found that participants had developed multiple autonomy-supportive relationships, with their fellow priests, women and laypeople. All these autonomy-supportive relationships were well established and when the participants' faced threat to their relational autonomy, these autonomy-supportive relationships provided immediate support and enabled the participants to maintain their relational autonomy and to make autonomous decisions.

Impactful Childhood

Twenty-six participants narrated close attachment to their biological mothers. This is in line with the existing literature that shows that the infants develop an attachment to their primary caregivers (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988). Only two participants did not form a secure attachment to their mothers. Thirteen participants narrated experiencing difficulties in their relationship with their biological fathers and because of that, they formed only distant relationships with them. According to the literature, the attachment to the primary caregivers enables the infant to form internal working models that would later on work as a cognitive map for all the future attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1979, 1980; Granqvist et al., 2012; Miner, 2009). The study found that in the case of some participants, the secure attachment internal working models developed due to their secure attachment to their mothers did not get transferred onto their attachment to their fathers, as a consequence they did not form a secure attachment to their fathers. This shows that even if the

infants developed a secure attachment, internal working models, if the significant adults don't reciprocate the children's efforts to form a secure attachment to them, then the children would not be able to transfer those secure attachment internal working models on to their attachment to these adults.

Because of the distant relationship with their fathers, these participants did not enjoy the freedom to express their needs and concerns to their fathers. According to the literature, significant others can affect relational autonomy development in childhood (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Walter & Ross, 2014). Here the supportive relationship with the mothers helped them to substitute their lack of freedom in their relationship with their fathers, and subsequently develop their relational autonomy.

Twenty-one participants narrated forming close bonding with both the parents and some of them who had initially developed an insecure attachment to their fathers during their growing up years underwent a shift in their relationship with their fathers. Eight participants who had formed a distant relationship with their fathers, as they moved into adulthood, made a positive shift in their relationship with their fathers. This shift enabled them to form a new close supportive relationship with their fathers. The shift occurred either because the participants changed their perception about their fathers' behaviour towards them, or their fathers themselves reduced their problematic behaviour and became more responsible towards the family. For a few participants, their relationship with their fathers throughout their life remained distant. These findings show that human attachment is dynamic and a shift can occur in an individual's attachment relationship. These findings have a lot of significance for the practitioners working with the individuals with an insecure attachment relationship, that through appropriate interventions and therapies a positive shift can be made in an individual's insecure attachment relationship.

Close bonding with the parents enabled the participants to form close and supportive relationships with other adults in their childhood. Twenty-six participants had formed supportive relationships with other adults in their childhood. This is a significant finding as all the twenty-six participants who were securely attached to their mothers were able to transfer the secure attachment to other available adults in their childhood. These findings are in agreement with the existing literature that states that attachment to the primary caregivers enables the infant to form internal working models that would later on work as a cognitive map for all the future attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1979, 1980; Granqvist et al., 2012; Miner, 2009).

Twenty-five participants experienced freedom in childhood. The freedom enabled them to engage in active exploration of their surrounding world, and to form close relationships with peers, to engage in learning through play and other explorations. This is in agreement with the literature that states that secure attachment to the parents enables the children to engage in an exploration of their surrounding world. (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1979, 1982, 1988; Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist et al., 2012; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). This freedom enabled the participants to take foundational steps towards the development of relational autonomy and to make simple autonomous decisions. Twenty-seven participants narrated forming secure relationships with their peers, which enabled them to learn the basics of mutual autonomy support.

Nineteen participants narrated experiencing punitive discipline in their childhood. Some of them received punitive discipline at home by fathers or elder siblings, and in the school by teachers. Most of the punitive discipline occurred in the school context. The punitive discipline had negatively affected the participants' capacity to form supportive relationships with these individuals as they were playing a significant role in the participant life at that particular moment. These findings have significance for the studies related to parenting and disciplining children in the classroom settings, that punitive discipline severely damages the child's capacity to develop relational autonomy.

Experiences in the Formation

All the 28 participants received support from some formators. The support from the formators enabled the participants to develop relational autonomy. Eight participants experienced their formator's trust, because of which they were given additional responsibilities and freedom to make autonomous decisions. This, in turn, contributed towards their relational autonomy development. Even though all the participants had received support from some formators or the other, only one-quarter of the participants experienced their formators' trust. This is a significant finding for the Church, as only eight participants experienced their formators trust. Since the experience of trust from their formators enhanced the participants' relational autonomy, the Church could focus on training the formators to place their trust in the seminarians. These findings also have significance for the practitioners working towards improving adolescents' and emerging adults' relational autonomy; that significant adults investing trust in the adolescents and emerging adults' and

entrusting responsibilities to them would promote higher levels of relational autonomy development.

Lack of autonomy support from some formators negatively affected the participants' capacity to develop relational autonomy. This is in agreement with the existing literature that states that individuals need significant others' support to develop relational autonomy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2019; Walter & Ross, 2013, 2014), and the significant others can also block the individuals' relational autonomy development (Christman, 2014; Mackenzie, 2019; Walter & Ross, 2013). Even though the participants experienced threats to their relational autonomy in their relationship with some formators, the autonomy and emotional support from other formators mitigated the negative effect of the formators who did not provide autonomy support, and enabled the participants to develop their relational autonomy.

Seven participants narrated the experience of freedom during the formation period. These participants stated that some formators gave them freedom and personal space, which enabled them to develop their relational autonomy. These findings are in line with the studies carried out on the general population that found that teachers' autonomy support enabled the students to experience autonomy satisfaction (Cheon et al., 2019; Reeve et al., 2020), to develop authentic inner campus (Assor et al., 2019) and to become independent (Pawlak & Kruk, 2012). These findings have a lot of significance for the Church, as only seven participants which mean only a quarter of the sample experienced freedom during their formation period. Since the experience of freedom during the formation has enabled these participants to develop their relational autonomy appropriate changes could be made in the formation programme that would enable more seminarians to experience freedom and subsequently develop their relational autonomy.

Interpersonal Relationships

Concerning the interpersonal relationships, 27 participants had formed supportive relationships with their fellow priests. These findings are in agreement with other studies that found that Roman Catholic priests had developed good friendships with their fellow priests (Rossetti & Rhoades, 2013), and the priests had larger social support system (Baumann et al., 2017). Participants had formed supportive relationships with their fellow priests across generations.

Twenty-two participants stated that they had developed a supportive relationship with laypeople. These findings are in agreement with other studies that

found the Roman Catholic priests formed supportive relationships with lay people (Krindatch & Hoge, 2010; Rossetti & Rhoades, 2013). The supportive relationships with the laypeople and their encouragement contributed towards the participants' relational autonomy development. These findings show that these participants did not become captives in the image of the priest as someone set apart from the general population (Krindatch & Hoge, 2010), rather they transcended that image and expanded their interpersonal relationship circle to the laypeople.

Fifteen participants had formed an intimate supportive relationship with women, and most of these women were nuns, who also lived celibate lives. Often these were mutual autonomy-supportive relationships. The participants, from these women, not only received warmth, affection, recognition and appreciation of their abilities and competencies that were crucial for their relational autonomy development, they also offered the same in return. These findings have a lot of significance for the studies related to priestly celibacy and choosing other types of sexual identity, that even if people don't get married or cohabitate with another individual, remain celibate or single, they can still attain their sexual identity, and form intimate relationships with the persons of the opposite sex.

The study findings related to the participants' interpersonal relationships have a lot of significance for the studies on identity and intimacy. According to Erikson (1977), only those individuals who have identity achieved would be able to form an intimate relationship with other individuals. The study results show that the participants have formed an intimate relationship with both men and women, and from this, it can be interpreted that many of these participants have attained their identities.

Relationship with the Persons in Authority

Twenty-five participants narrated that they had received autonomy support at least form one provincial. Eighteen participants stated that they experienced their provincials' trust, which boosted up their relational autonomy development. Provincials had placed their confidence in these participants' abilities to make autonomous decisions and entrusted them with greater responsibilities. Along with the additional responsibilities the participants were also given the freedom to make autonomous decisions related to those responsibilities. These findings are in agreement with other studies carried out on the general population that found that managers' autonomy support improved the employees' performance (Kanat-Maymon

& Reizer, 2017), job satisfaction and wellbeing (Gilbert et al., 2017; Moreau & Mageau, 2012). These findings show that despite the vow of obedience to obey the provincials' decisions, the participants and the provincials were able to work together for the common goal. And the vow of obedience did not become a barrier for most of the participants to form a supportive relationship with their provincials. These studies have a lot of significance for the studies on authority and leadership that the persons in authority also can promote relational autonomy development among the individuals under their care.

There was an improvement in the number of participants experiencing significant others' trust. While during the formation phase-only eight participants narrated experiences of trust from the formators, and after the ordination when they moved into their priestly ministries 18 participants narrated experiences of trust from their provincials. These findings require further exploration to understand why a lesser number of participants experienced their formators' trust.

Twenty-five participants stated that they faced difficulties in their relationship with some provincials. They narrated that some provincials were insensitive towards their problems and challenges. These findings are in agreement with other studies that found the Roman Catholic priests experienced difficulties in their relationship with the persons in authority (Cornelio, 2012; Galea, 2011; Krindatch & Hoge, 2010). Eight participants narrated that they had disagreements with their provincials. Most often these disagreements were purely on the ideological level, and at times regarding the decisions related to the participants' priestly ministry. These findings have a lot of significance for relational autonomy as it shows that individuals who have developed high relational autonomy while respecting their commitments in the case of the current study participants their vow of obedience, would voice their opinion on the matters that they believed to be true and authentic and relevant to their priestly identity.

Twenty-six participants narrated about various power groups operating in their respective provinces. These power groups that had been formed based on caste, region or language, controlled the provincials' legitimate power and decisions. Sometimes the power groups pressurised the provincial to give plum opportunities to the members who had an unofficial affiliation to their power group. These power groups seem to be posing a big challenge to the provincial's relational autonomy as they didn't allow him to make autonomous decisions. These findings have a lot of

significance for the studies related to organizational behaviour, and how the operations of various subgroups affect the organizational culture and functioning. These findings also have significance for the Church, as these power groups are posing a threat to the Church as an organization, and its functioning effectively.

Decision Making Process

Eighteen participants narrated incidents of assertiveness in their decision making. They demonstrated assertive behaviours at times in their relationship with their fellow priests, people in their priestly ministry, or with their provincials. The assertiveness behaviour shows that these participants had developed relational autonomy, and were able to put it into practice in relevant situations.

Nineteen participants expressed a belief in Gods' plan for their life. These findings are in agreement with the existing literature that states that God calls the Catholic priests for a particular mission to be accomplished through them (Hankle, 2010; Maciel, 1992). Often this belief had a significant effect on the participants' relational autonomy, as it made them use relational autonomy differently than the way the general population would use it. Even though at times the participants did not like to move to a particular ministry or an institution, they decided to move into those places and carry out their responsibilities in those disliked contexts and settings. Because of the well-developed relational autonomy, these participants had developed required negotiation skills to engage in a meaningful dialogue with their provincials and convince the provincial to change his decision to send them to those disliked settings.

Their belief in God's undisclosed plan and their respect for the vow of obedience, made these participants accept the responsibilities in those disliked settings even without negotiating with the provincials. Here they used their relational autonomy to cooperate with the provincial and to obey him. Even though only three participants stated belief in 'God's will' through the superiors, majority of the participants who chose to cooperate with provincials, even though at times they did not like the provincial's choice for them, had implicitly expressed the belief in God's plan for them to work for the people in those disliked settings. Because of this little more than half of the participants narrated that they respected and obeyed the provincial's decision even though they did not like it.

The act of obedience for these participants was not blind or fearful obedience, rather a free decision to go with the provincial's decision, either because of the belief

in God's plan, or respect towards their vow of obedience. Even seventeen participants at times found it difficult to obey the provincial's decisions, either because they did not appear to be objective or at times these decisions denied their rightful opportunities, yet they chose to obey the provincial. Even though some of them voiced their concerns about some of the provincial's decisions that appeared to be lacking objectivity, ultimately, they respected and accepted even these decisions, because they believed in God's plan for their life. These findings have a lot of significance for the studies related to relational autonomy, that even if the individuals' freedom is restricted due to various conditions, they are capable of developing their relational autonomy and function autonomously.

Attachment to God

the third objective of the study was 'to understand the way the Indian Catholic priests form the attachment to God representations.' The study found that 26 participants had developed representations of a secure attachment to God, and 20 had developed representations of a secure attachment to the Virgin Mary.

God as an Attachment Figure

Twenty-six participants had formed a secure attachment to God representations. These findings are in agreement with the existing literature that states that for the Catholic priests (Cassibba et al., 2008) and believers God can be a perfect attachment figure (Granqvist et al., 2012; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008, 2016). Only one participant had developed representations of an insecure attachment to God and another participant of an avoidant attachment to God. Six participants narrated a shift in their attachment to God. Among these six, three participants experienced a shift from an insecure to secure attachment relationship, and the remaining three had already formed a secure attachment to God, for these individuals the shift was towards a more sophisticated understanding of God. These findings are in line with another study (Proctor et al., 2009) which found a shift in believers' attachment to God.

Five participants along with God had formed representations of a secure attachment to Jesus. Twenty participants developed representations of a secure attachment to the Virgin Mary. These findings are in agreement with the existing literature that states that along with God other spiritual personalities can also become attachment figures (Cassibba et al., 2008; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). All the participants who had developed secure attachment representations in their relationship

with Jesus and the Virgin Mary had also developed secure attachment representation in their relationship with God.

Seeking and Maintaining Proximity to God

Participants used multiple ways to remain connected to God. Eighteen participants connected to God through prayer. These findings are in agreement with another study (Kimball et al., 2013) that found that believers used prayers as a means of contact with God. Thirteen participants connected to God through meditation, 10 through the Holy Eucharist. In the Catholic Church, the Holy Eucharist is believed to be the body and blood of Christ (The Canon Law Society, 1983). Seventeen participants also used the Bible as a means of relating to God. The Catholic Church believes the Bible to be the Word of God (The Canon Law Society, 1983). Twelve participants engaged in a free spontaneous talk with God. This shows that these participants perceived God as someone with whom they could engage in a personal conversation. In their spontaneous conversation with God, they freely expressed their fears, hopes and concerns, and they thanked God when they felt that God responded to their concerns. These expressions have a strong resemblance to human attachment relationships and show that for these participants God was an attachment figure. The study findings that participants maintain proximity to God through Scriptures, Holy Eucharist, meditation and spontaneous conversation with God adds to the exiting literature on the way believers maintain proximity to God.

Eighteen participants stated that they tangibly felt God's presence in their lives, this made them feel that they were constantly in touch with God. These findings are in agreement with another study that found the participants felt the power of God's presence in their lives (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2014). These findings show that believers who are securely attached to God would tangibly feel the presence of God, like a securely attached child would feel the presence of the attachment figure.

Twenty-two participants expressed struggles to maintain a close relationship with God. They stated that at times they couldn't connect to God through their prayers. Some participants also had difficulties to place their trust in God, as they found that God was not answering their requests. These findings are in agreement with another study that found that believers experienced frustration at God's lack of responsiveness to their requests (Counted, 2016). Even though the participants experienced struggles in their relationship with God, these struggles did not affect their core relationship with God. These findings show that the participants' attachment

to God relationship, like any other human attachment relationship, has moments of closeness and separation. When the participants felt God's responsiveness to their needs they felt closely connected to God. And in the moments where they perceived God not being responsive or where they expected God to protect them, and did not experience protection some of them felt let down and displayed anger and protest. This is in agreement with the literature that shows that at the moments of threats of separation from the attachment figure people would show anger and protest (Bowlby, 1973, 1979; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002).

God as a Haven of Safety

Concerning the theme of God as a haven of safety, 22 participants stated that they turned to God during the frightening or alarming events. These findings are in agreement with other studies (Kimball et al., 2013; Proctor et al., 2009) that found that believers in the moments of anxiety and perception of threat turned to God for security and consolation. The situations that prompted the participants to turn to God for support were mostly related to psychological harm, and at times also threats to their priestly ministries. Many participants stated that God responded to their concerns and supported them. These findings are in agreement with another study (Counted, 2016) that found that participants perceived God as someone who was responsive to their needs and supported them.

Eighteen participants stated that during the moments of illness, injury and fatigue, they turned to God for support. These findings are in agreement with the literature that states that when the children experience illness, injury or fatigue they would turn to the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1979, 1982). Only six participants narrated incidents of turning to God during the threats of separation from their loved ones due to life-threatening illnesses. The participants narrated mixed reaction in this regard. Some stated that when their loved one was facing a life-threatening illness, turning to God was beneficial as God worked a miracle for them, and their loved ones recovered from illness. An experience of miracle enabled these participants to reinvest their trust in God. Whereas for others turning to God during those moments did not offer any advantage as their loved one succumbed to death. This lack of positive response from God at these vulnerable moments made these participants initially feel angry and disappointed with God.

These findings have a lot of significance for the studies related to relational autonomy and identity development. A secure attachment to God would enable

individuals to develop relational autonomy and identity. An experience of God as a haven of safety would enable the individuals who are securely attached to God, in the moments of threats to their relational autonomy, to turn to God for autonomy support and to make autonomous decisions. An experience of God as a haven of safety would enable the individuals, in the moments of threats to their freedom to choose identity commitments or in living out their identity commitments, to use God's support to maintain their autonomy to choose and live out their identity commitments.

God as a Secure Base

Concerning the theme of God as a secure base 25 participants stated that God was a reliable source of support for them, during various challenging moments in their lives. Some participants experienced God's support during some specific challenging events related to their priestly life. Other participants did not report any specific events, yet they had a generalized feeling of God's constant available support to carry out their priestly ministries. The experience of God's support enabled the participants to use God as a secure base to explore and expand their priestly ministry. These findings are in agreement with other studies (Counted, 2016; Granqvist et al., 2012; Kimball et al., 2013; Proctor et al., 2009) that found that believers used God as a secure base. The experience of support and security from God enabled the participants to engage in various types of priestly ministries and face the challenges that arouse both in their personal lives and priestly mission. This is in agreement with the existing literature that shows that people use the attachment figure as a secure base to explore (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1979, 1982, 1988; Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist et al., 2012; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002) and to expand their comfort zone (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

The other qualities of the secure base that emerged in the study were the experience of God's love and goodness. Fourteen participants stated that they experienced God's love and 12 participants said that they experienced God's goodness. These findings are in agreement with other studies that found that believers expressed that God loved them personally (Counted, 2016; Rossetti & Rhoades, 2013). These findings show that the participants were attached to God in a similar way they would get attached to a human attachment figure and maintained an emotional bonding with God.

These findings have a lot of significance in the studies related to relational autonomy and identity development. The experience of God as a secure base would

enable the individuals to develop their relational autonomy, and at the same time, it would also enable them to engage in identity explorations.

Perceiving God as Stronger and Wiser

Concerning the theme perceiving God as stronger and wiser, the participants stated that they experienced God's protection and guidance, 16 participants said that they experienced God's guidance and believed in God's ability to solve their problems and surrendered them to God. The participants believed that God was stronger and wiser than any other human person and knew how to lead them out of their challenges and difficulties. These findings are in agreement with other studies (Counted, 2016; Kimball et al., 2013) that found that believers viewed God as stronger and wiser than themselves and other human persons. Sixteen participants said that they experienced God's protection. This is in agreement with the existing literature that states that children experience protection from the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1982). The participants stated that God protected them in the moments of harm and prevented the occurrence of other harms.

Perceiving God as stronger and wiser has a lot of significance for the relational autonomy and identity studies. In the moments of threats to their relational autonomy those individuals who perceive God to be stronger and wiser would experience confidence and courage to maintain their relational autonomy and make autonomous decisions. When the individuals experience threat in living out their identity commitments, the perception of availability of God who is stronger and wiser would enable them to feel confident to live out their identity commitments.

Individual Differences in Attachment to God

Concerning the individual differences in attachment to God, the current study found strong support for the correspondence pathways. Twenty-four participants narratives had themes of correspondence. These findings are in agreement with other studies that found the themes of correspondence in the devotees' attachment to God relationship (Hall et al., 2009; Miner, 2009). The reason for the current study participants to develop strong correspondence could be because of the parallels between the participants' parents and God. The Roman Catholic tradition perceives God as a fraternal father (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Seventeen participants used the language of the parent-child relationship to describe their relationship with God. These participants viewed God as a paternal attachment figure, only one participant perceived God as a maternal attachment figure. These findings are in agreement with

the Roman Catholic tradition that perceives God to be a fatherly figure (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). This had probably impacted a strong correspondence between the participants' attachment to the parents and their attachment to God. One participant who had an insecure attachment to parents also formed an insecure attachment to God. One participant with a secure attachment to his parents did not form a secure attachment to God. This finding is in agreement with other studies (Huguelet et al., 2015; Miner, 2009) that found that individuals who were securely attached to the parents did not develop a secure attachment to God.

Twenty participants, along with God had developed a secure attachment representation in their relationship with the Virgin Mary. These findings add to the existing literature on attachment to God. There seem to be two possible reasons for the participants to develop representations of secure attachment to the Virgin Mary. One reason could be that the Roman Catholic Tradition presents the Virgin Mary as a maternal attachment figure (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016), so the participants could have been influenced by the Catholic traditional perceptions of the Virgin Mary. The other possibility is that all the participants who were securely attached to the Virgin Mary were also securely attached to their biological mothers, who were their primary attachment figures. So, there seems to be a possibility of correspondence between the secure attachment to earthly mothers and secure attachment to the Virgin Mary.

The study also found themes of compensation. These findings are in agreement with the existing literature (Huguelet et al., 2015; Miner, 2009; Sim & Yow, 2011) that found themes of compensation in the devotees' attachment to God. In the current study, only three participants stated themes of compensation. For these participants, the attachment to God compensated their lack of attachment to their parents. Three participants were insecurely attached to their fathers, and among these, two of them were securely attached to their mothers. Precisely speaking only one participant fully qualified for the compensation pathway, as he didn't have a secure attachment to either of the parents, yet formed a secure attachment to God. For the other two, it was only partially compensated as they had formed a secure attachment to their biological mothers.

The difference in the Presence of Themes Between the Groups

The foruth, fifth and sixth objectives of the study were 'to understand the difference between the Indian Catholic priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the educational ministry settings and the pastoral ministry settings, in the way they

construct their identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.' The study found that when the presence of the themes was compared in both the groups, for some themes the participants from the educational ministry settings varied with the participants from the pastoral ministry settings. The differences between the groups show that the differences in the encounters and experiences in the priestly ministry resulted in the participants developing different themes for the priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God narratives. This is in agreement with the existing literature that states that individuals' narratives are strongly influenced by their personal experiences and the cultural context in which the narrative is developed (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Guo, 2015). The context of each priestly ministry provided certain opportunities, and set certain limitations to the participants and these opportunities and limitations impacted the way they developed the themes related to identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.

These findings have a lot of significance for the studies on identity and relational autonomy development. The future researches related to identity development need to take the impact of the context on the individuals' identity development. The practitioners working on supporting the individuals' in their efforts to develop their identity and relational autonomy need to focus on positively influencing the contextual factors so that individuals can develop wholistic identity.

The difference between the groups also has a lot of significance for the Church as the results show that the expressions of the Catholic priests' relational autonomy are different from the general population. The priests working in pastoral settings and educational settings face different challenges to maintain their relational autonomy and to make autonomy decisions. In the process of enabling the priests' relational autonomy one needs to take the context in which the priests carry out their priestly ministry. Because the autonomy needs of priests in the pastoral ministry settings are different from the priests in the educational ministry settings.

The difference between the groups has a lot of significance for the studies on attachment to God. As the study findings show that the context in which individuals live out their identity commitments, and the nature of those identity commitments would impact the way they develop their attachment to God narratives. The challenges or the absence of challenges in an individuals' life play a significant role in the development of various themes related to attachment to God. The current study found that a higher number of participants carrying out their priestly responsibilities

in the pastoral ministry settings had developed the theme God as a haven of safety and a higher number of participants from the education ministry background had developed the theme God as a secure base. These findings show that all the individuals with a secure attachment to God, would not develop all the major themes related to attachment to God. The life context may influence the individuals to develop only certain themes related to attachment to God. These findings add to the existing literature on attachment to God.

Theory Development

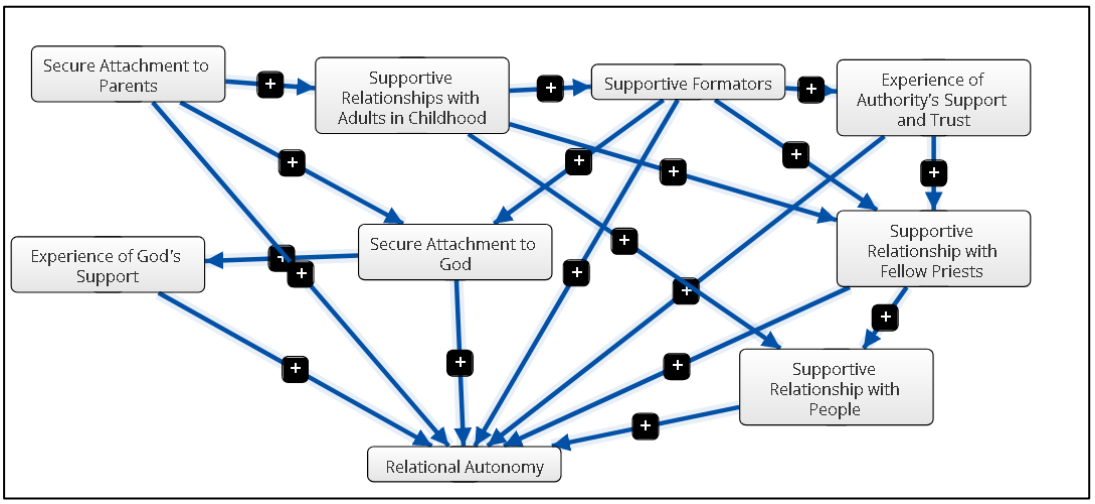
The seventh objective of the study was 'to develop a theory on the influence of attachment to God and relational autonomy on the Indian Catholic priests' priestly identity development. The study found evidence for the conceptual frame related to theory development presented in figure 2. In the following section, this theory is explained in detail through causal network analysis. As presented in the conceptual frame in figure 2, attachment to God and relational autonomy contributed towards the Roman Catholic priests' identity development.

Causal Chains - Across the Case Analysis

According to Miles et al. (2014), the investigator can suggest causal chains which are the possible links between the variables, one variable leading to cause the other variable. The causal chains can be built for multiple cases together (Huberman & Miles, 1989). The causal chain is a display of the process of analysis that "could even be used as a way of generating research hypotheses and developing theory" (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013, p.360). In a cross-case analysis, all the cases in the study are analyzed and the most influential variables affecting the other variables or one variable leading to the other variables are identified, and causal chains are drawn in a linear manner (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the following section, the investigator analysed the causal chains across the cases.

Figure 3

Casual network links across the cases for the Indian Catholic priests' relational autonomy development.

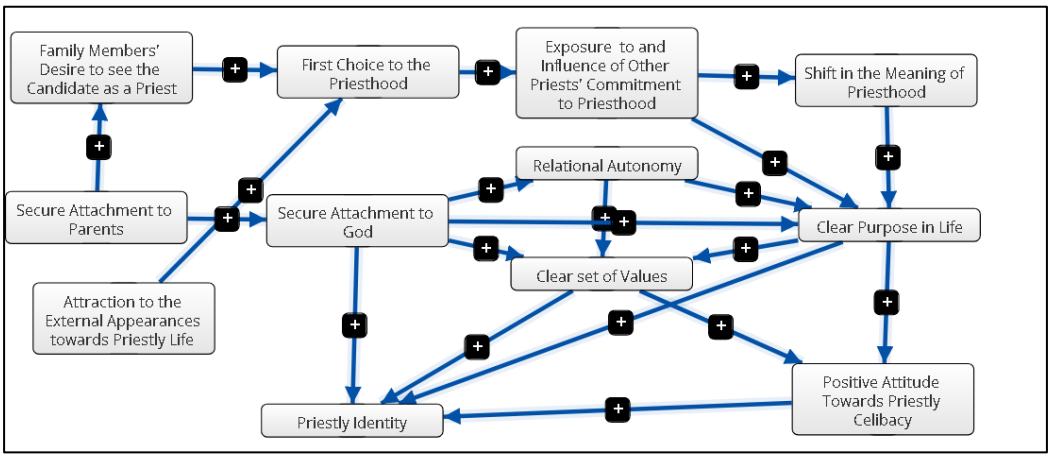

Secure Attachment to Parents
Supportive Relationships with Adults in Childhood
Supportive Formators
Experience of Authority's Support and Trust
Experience of God's Support
Secure Attachment to God
Supportive Relationship with Fellow Priests
Supportive Relationship with People
Relational Autonomy

Note. The symbol → shows how one variable is causing or leading to the other variable. The symbol + signifies a positive relationship between the two variables.

As presented in figure 3, the secure attachment to God, supportive relationship with adults in childhood, formators, fellow priests, authority, and with the laypeople directly contributed towards the participants' relational autonomy development. The secure attachment to God and the experience of God's strength and protection sometimes directly and other times indirectly contributed towards the participants' relational autonomy development and autonomous decisions. Even though it was enough for the participants to have one autonomy-supportive relationship to maintain their relational autonomy. Those who developed autonomy-supportive relationships, developed multiple autonomy-supportive relationships and experienced God's protection and support, so these participants could use any one of these supportive relationships to maintain their autonomy. Those few participants who failed to develop supportive relationships with others and did not form a secure attachment to God failed to develop relational autonomy. The number of these participants was significantly very small.

Figure 4

Casual network links across the cases for the influence of attachment to God and relational autonomy on the Indian Catholic priests' identity formation.


Family Members' Desire to see the Candidate as a Priest
First Choice to the Priesthood
Exposure to and Influence of Other Priests' Commitment to Priesthood
Shift in the Meaning of Priesthood
Relational Autonomy
Secure Attachment to Parents
Secure Attachment to God
Clear Purpose in Life
Clear set of Values
Attraction to the External Appearances towards Priestly Life
Positive Attitude Towards Priestly Celibacy
Priestly Identity

Note. The symbol → shows how one variable is causing or leading to the other variable. The symbol + signifies a positive relationship between the two variables.

As presented in figure 4, the secure attachment to the parents influenced some participants to give serious thought to the parents' and close family members' desire to make a first choice towards the priesthood. Along with this, the external appearances such as reverence and respect the priest received from the community, and the priestly robes also contributed towards some participants' first decision to become priests. The other participants out of normal curiosity explored the possibility of becoming priests.

The first decision to become priests made them join the seminaries that offered formation to become Roman Catholic priests. The formation gave an exposure to the other priests' commitment to their priestly living. This exposure brought a shift in the understanding of the priesthood. For those participants who did not have a proper initial motive, this shift was towards understanding the essential meaning of the priesthood and to identify a purpose for their priestly life. And for other participants, the shift enabled them to identify either a single or multiple purposes in life, which provided them with a direction to their life. The participants' purpose in life directly contributed towards the priestly identity, along with it, it also contributed towards choosing appropriate values to carry out their priestly purpose. A clear set of values to live by directly contributed towards the priestly identity. At the same time, some participants who were holding on to a rigid value system developed serious interpersonal conflicts with their fellow priests. A clear purpose and a clear set of

values contributed towards a positive attitude towards the priestly celibacy and to perceive the priestly celibacy as the freedom to achieve their purpose in life.

For those participants who had developed a positive attitude towards the priestly celibacy and those who perceived celibacy as the freedom to achieve their life purpose celibacy directly contributed towards their priestly identity. Meaningful priestly celibacy contributed to the sexual identity of these participants. Those participants who were still struggling to integrate their sexual attractions into meaningful priestly celibacy were yet to attain a meaningful sexual identity.

The secure attachment to God directly influenced the priestly identity, as the participants perceived priesthood as a service to God and service to humanity and it gave a spiritual element to their priestly identity. The secure attachment to God also indirectly influenced the priestly identity through relational autonomy, which played a crucial role in the selection of life purpose, and a set of values to live by, all these three also influenced the formation of priestly identity. A few participants who have not developed a secure attachment to God failed to develop a meaningful spiritual element into their priestly identity and developed only a service element in their priestly identity. Even though these participants were involved in the spiritual activities, yet they couldn't draw deeper meaning and contentment from their spiritual ministry and at times they partially draw some contentment from their service, in comparison with other participants these participants enjoyed lower levels of contentment in their priestly life.

Relational autonomy indirectly influenced the formation of the priestly identity. It had a direct impact on the participants' selection of purpose in life and a clear set of values. The relational autonomy enabled them to engage in the process of exploration of purpose in life and also to enter into a meaningful dialogue with other individuals to arrive at a clear life purpose and to choose appropriate values to live by. Relational autonomy also played a significant role in the participants' living out their priestly identity commitment. When they faced challenges and threats in making identity consist of decisions their relational autonomy enabled them to draw support from the autonomy-supportive relationships and to make identity consistent decisions and to function autonomously. Those participants who had developed low levels of relational autonomy even though developed values and purpose in life, in the moments of threats and challenges to their identity commitments, values and purpose in life failed to remain autonomous and to make identity consistent decisions.

Implications

1. The study found that parents and other significant adults influence adolescents' identity choices, so there is a need for the parents and significant adults to be sufficiently well informed about various identity choices available to the adolescents so that they can support the adolescents in their identity exploration and identity commitment.
2. The study found that the individuals' first attraction towards an identity choice is often towards its external appearances, and deeper exploration would enable them to understand the intricacies of that particular identity. Mentors play a crucial role in encouraging the adolescents and emerging adults to enter into meaningful discussions related to their identity choices and to expand their understanding about that particular identity choice. In the educational settings, various psychoeducation programmes and group discussions related to identity exploration could be organized for the adolescents and emerging adults.
3. The study found that value differences with other people can cause a rupture in interpersonal relationships. These findings have a lot of significance for the practitioners dealing with the interpersonal conflicts among couples or other individuals. It would be helpful to explore their value system to understand whether the interpersonal conflict is a value conflict. If so, they could use appropriate interventions that enable these individuals to explore their value differences and arrive at a meaningful conflict resolution.
4. Since the study found that values build a close relationship with others who hold a similar set of values and engage in conflict with others who hold a different set of values. Psychologists and social workers need to focus on developing value education material that could be used by the teachers to help students to understand their as well as other's value system, and by respecting one another's value system live harmoniously with other individuals.
5. The study found that individuals would greatly benefit in their identity development if they get an opportunity to observe other individuals with similar identities living-out their identity commitment effectively. So, providing an opportunity for adolescents and emerging adults to have a personal encounter with these individuals would be very beneficial for their identity development.
6. The study found that individuals' attachment to their parents influenced their attachment to other adults in childhood, formators and persons in authority.

Special opportunities could be provided to the seminarians/adolescents to reflect on their relationship with their parents, and any difficulties in this area could be resolved through appropriate therapies.

7. The participants narrated experiences of support and difficulties in their relationship with the formators/mentors. The support from the formators/mentors enabled the participants to develop their relational autonomy and the difficulties from the formators/mentors undermined their relational autonomy development. The practitioners and social worker could focus on preparing the mentors to provide autonomy support to the adolescents and emerging adults under their care.
8. The study found that having multiple autonomy-supportive relationships are beneficial for individuals. When one supportive relationship is not available, they can draw autonomy support from the other relationships. So, individuals need to develop multiple autonomy-supportive relationships.
9. The study found that after individuals attain their identity achievement, they would face various challenges in living out their identity commitments. Through the autonomy support from the significant others, they were able to face those challenges and maintained their autonomy and made identity consistent decisions. So, the practitioners and psychologists need to focus on developing individuals' relational autonomy.
10. Majority of the participants have stated that a lot of power groups were operating within their provinces. These power groups were affecting the relational autonomy of the provincial as well as the priests in that particular province. The Roman Catholic Church need to find ways and means to dissolve these power groups and once again restore the power into the position of authority, or in the legitimate team.
11. The study found a strong influence of the individuals' attachment to their parents on their attachment to God relationship. Those individuals interested in improving their attachment to God could focus on improving their relationship with their parents, and form a secure attachment to God.
12. The study found that secure attachment to God contributes towards relational autonomy. Those individuals who are securely attached to God can turn to God for their autonomy support and make their identity choices and live out their identity commitments. The psychologists could develop various interventions that would enable the believers to form a secure attachment to God so that with the

security and protection from the secure attachment to God they could face their identity challenges with ease and expand their comfort zone.

13. The study found the influence of context on the way the participants developed their identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God. This has a lot of implications for the practitioners who are interested in enhancing the individuals' identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God. The practitioners need to pay attention to the contextual conditions in which the individuals develop their identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.

Study Limitations

- The current study was limited only to the middle-aged religious Catholic priests from the South Indian region. The religious Catholic priests who are younger or older might present completely different narratives.
- Because of the differences in the nature of the authority, and the lifestyle between the Catholic religious priests and the diocesan priests, the current study findings which were focused on the Catholic religious priests, cannot be generalized to the diocesan priests.
- The current study participants were all from the South Indian cultural background. The priests from the Indian collectivistic cultural contexts might have developed different narratives for their relational autonomy and priestly identity, and attachment to God. So, these findings cannot be generalized to the Indian priests from the collectivistic cultural backgrounds.
- The Indian Catholic priests working in the legal, communication, physical and mental health settings might encounter different experinces in their priestly ministry context, because of that, the current study findings cannot be generalized to the priests carrying out their priestly responsibilities in these settings.
- Since the current study was qualitative, all the themes presented in the study are only representations and not categories, one needs to read the results as representations of the Indian Catholic priests' identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.

Future Directions

- The qualitative results for priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God could be corroborated with quantitative measures.

- A quantitative study establishing the correlations between priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God could be carried out.
- An identity styles inventory to measure the Roman Catholic priest's identity levels could be developed.
- A scale to measure the Catholic priests' relational autonomy could be developed.
- The same study could be carried out on the Indian Catholic diocesan priests and the priests coming from collectivistic cultural backgrounds.
- The same study could be carried out on the Indian Catholic religious women to explore how the women religious who also dedicated their lives for the spiritual mission would develop their identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.
- The same study could be carried out to explore the identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God narratives of the Roman Catholic priests working in the legal, media and health care and mental health care settings.
- A comparative study could be carried out to explore the differences between the Indian Roman Catholic religious priests and diocesan priests' priestly identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God.
- A deeper exploration of differences between the priests carrying out their priestly ministry in the education and pastoral settings could be carried out to ascertain which aspects of their priestly ministry is the cause of the differences between these groups.

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Appendix 1

Sociodemographic Details

No.

Age:

State of Origin:

State of Residence:

Mother Tongue:

Year of Ordination:

Type of priestly affiliation: Diocese / Religious Congregation

Currently pursuing any studies:

Educational qualification

Academic: B.A / B.Ed. / PG / M.Phil. / Ph.D.

Professional: Psychology / Social Work / Law / Engineering / Management / Other

Ecclesiastical: Licentiate / PhD

Responsibilities held: Principal / Teacher / Professor / Formator / Seminary Professor/ Parish Priest / Community Leader / Social Worker / Lawyer / Engineer / Other

Email Id:

Phone No:

Appendix 2

Informed Consent Form

No.

Dear Father

I am D. Raja Gopal Reddy doing PhD in Psychology at Christ University, Bengaluru. As part of my study, I am doing a research on "Indian catholic priests' identity, relational autonomy and attachment to God" under the supervision of Varghese K J, Professor, Dept. of Psychology, Christ University. My study involves interviewing Catholic priests. You will be expected to respond to the various questions I will be asking you on your priestly life, your relationship with God, your relationship with your fellow priests and with your authority, and your celibate life and your emotional support system. Your participation in this study will contribute towards a better understanding of the Indian Catholic priests' identity, their relationship with their fellow priests, with the people in authority and with God.

In regard to your benefits through participation in the study, this study can provide you with an opportunity to review your priestly life and understand various people and situations that have transformed your life and contributed towards your growth. Since this interview involves a lot of sharing of your life stories and feelings, it will be audio-recorded and later on transcribed for the purpose of the study. After the analysis of the data, the themes will be emailed to you, to check whether they truly represent what you shared during the interview. If some of the themes do not represent what you shared during the interview, you can disagree with those themes and they will not be included in the main analysis; you can take two week's time for the same. The total interview time would last from 75 minutes to 90 minutes.

The information collected from you would be used only for the purpose of this study, and your personal details and your recording will be kept confidential.

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you have the complete freedom to withdraw from this study at any given point of time, without giving any reason for the withdrawal. In regard to answering the interview questions, you have the total freedom to decline to answer any of the questions that you feel uncomfortable to answer. If you have any doubts and concerns please let me clarify them for you.

I _____ received the information about the procedure of this study. I understood that I have the complete freedom to withdraw from this study at any point of time, without giving any reasons for withdrawing my consent. I give my consent to be a participant in this study. I understand that personally I may or may not benefit from this study.

_____	_____
Signature of the participant	Date
_____	_____
Signature of the Researcher	Date

D. Raja Gopal Reddy
PhD Research scholar,
Christ University
Bengaluru – 560029
Email.rajagopal.reddy@res.christuniversity.in

Appendix 3

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Could you describe your relationship with your parents?
    a. Other significant people in your childhood (grandparents, teachers, relatives, neighbours)
2. Please describe the challenging moments in your relationship with your parents in your childhood?
    a. With other important adults in childhood
    b. Their impact on your childhood development
    c. Ways of dealing with those challenges
3. Could you talk about some of your influential peers during formation?
    a. During the priestly life
4. Can you describe your relationships with your fellow priests?
    a. Could you narrate any challenges that you faced with your fellow priests?
    b. Impact of these challenges on your priestly ministry
    c. Ways of dealing with those challenges
5. Could you describe the situations where your fellow priests contributed towards the contentment in your ministry?
6. Could you talk about your relationship with your formators?
    a. Supportive relationships with formators
    b. Any challenges faced during the formation (pressures, disagreements, lack of freedom etc.)
    c. Impact of those challenges
7. Could you please describe your relationships with your provincial / bishop?
    a. Interactions with them during the transfers
    b. The situations where you and your authority had different views about the kind of priestly ministry for you.
    c. Your views and your authority views related to your studies and skills development for your priestly ministry
    d. Regarding the place of your priestly ministry
    e. Impact of these interactions on your life
    f. Ways of dealing with those interactions

8. Could you narrate the moments where you negotiated with the authority and made authority to change its decisions for you?
9. Could you narrate the situations where your life has been influenced by the influential sub-groups in your province/dioceses?
    a. Power groups
10. Please describe who is God for you?
    a. Factors contributed to the relationship with God.
11. Please narrate different experiences related to your relationship with God?
    a. Peak experiences in your relationship with God.
    b. Special moments of emotional connection with God.
12. Could you describe the fulfilling moments in your relationship with God?
13. Please narrate the situations where you felt the need for God?
    a. Moments could rely on God
    b. Moments could not rely on God
14. Could you describe the challenges in your relationship with God?
    a. Impact of these challenges on your spirituality
    b. Ways of dealing with those challenges
15. Please describe the moments where you felt that you have not lived up to God's expectations?
    a. The ways of coping with these situations.
    b. People who influenced in defining God's expectations for your life
16. Could you narrate the situations where you used your spirituality to deal with life challenges?
17. Could you narrate your first attraction towards priesthood?
    a. The person with whom you have shared this attraction.
18. Could you describe the persons who were influential in your decision to join the priesthood?
    a. Family and other people's suggestions
    b. Own interest to become a priest
19. Could you talk about the most influential people in your current priestly life?
    a. The type of influence they hold on to your priestly life.
20. What kind of ministry you have been assigned currently?
    a. Satisfying aspects of the ministry
    b. Challenges

    c. How did you face these challenges (values)?

21. Could you narrate the purpose of your priestly life?
    a. Which incidents or circumstances or people have shaped the purpose of your priestly life?
    b. Values that guide your priestly ministry?
22. Please describe your interpersonal relationships with people?
    a. Close friends
    b. With the beneficiaries
    c. The support system in the moments of struggles
23. Could you talk about how celibacy contributes towards your priestly life?
24. Commitment to priestly life requires celibacy, sometimes the celibate life can bring loneliness, and how do you deal with it?
    a. What are some challenges you face in celibacy?
    b. Impact of those challenges of your priestly life
    c. Ways of handling those challenges
25. Could you describe the contributions you make to society through your priestly ministry?
26. Could you describe the moments of fulfilment in your priestly ministry?
27. Could you narrate the various challenges you face in your priestly life?
    a. Impact of these challenges on priestly ministry.
    b. Ways of dealing with the challenges.
28. Please describe your yet to be achieved dreams and goals in your life?
    a. The plans to achieve those dreams and goals
29. Is there anything else that you would like to add to our sharing?